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"It has been a dear day," said Wythie. "In spite of our trials we do have blithe days in the little grey house."

YOUNG MODERNS BOOKSHELF

THE LITTLE GREY HOUSE

A Gay Story for Girls

BY

MARION AMES TAGGART

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CHAPTER ONE

ITS CHILDREN

"I am going to cut that grass—try to cut it, I mean—before I'm an hour older," said Roberta Grey, drawing on an old pair of her father's dog-skin gloves with a do-or-die-in-the-attempt air that was at once inspiring and convincing. "This whole place looks like an illustrated edition of 'How Plants Grow'—Grey. We've got to cut the grass or put up a sign: To Find the House Walk Northward Through the Prairie. Signed, Sylvester Grey. Will you help, Wythie and Prue?"

Oswyth, the eldest daughter, a year the senior of sixteen-year-old Roberta, looked up with her pleasant smile. "Help walk northward through the prairie, help find the house, or help cut the grass, Rob?" she asked.

"Help cut the grass, and the rest won't be necessary," laughed Rob. "Come on! I've borrowed Aunt Azraella's lawn-mower, though I

truly believe I might as well have borrowed the cheese-scoop—that grass is too old and tough to bow down to a mere lawn-mower."

Prue, being but fourteen, jumped up with alacrity to accept Rob's invitation, but Oswyth laid down her sewing and arose with a reluctant sigh—she was not fond of violent exercise, and the afternoon sun was still warm.

The three girls stood a few moments on the low door-step, letting the breeze pleasantly flutter their gingham dresses and lift their ribbons, before setting to their difficult task. The same breeze blew the tall grass which Roberta longed to lay low in undulating ripples like those in the blue and pink fabrics, which drifted into the picture like cornflowers and poppies. The feathery sprays of the millet and red-top, the wands of the timothy were so pretty as they bowed and swayed that, although they were so lawless and rank, it seemed almost a pity to cut them. Oswyth thought so, but Roberta felt no misgivings—except of her own strength.

The little grey house stood well back from the street under splendid trees, set in the midst of a place so wholly disproportioned to its size that it looked in the present unkempt condition of the grounds not unlike a little island of grey rock,

entirely surrounded by turbulent and billowy green water.

Everybody called it "the little grey house," and the name was doubly appropriate, since it did not matter whether one capitalized and emphasized the adjective, and spoke of it as "the little *Grey* house," or left to the adjective its natural function, and spoke of the tiny home as "the little grey *house*." For, as to color, it could not well have been greyer. It had once—not recently—been painted grey, but wind and weather had stripped it of its artificial greyness while tinting its clapboards into soft, indelible tints even more conformable to its title.

And, for the rest, Sylvester Grey lived there, as had his forebears for three generations preceding him—all Greys from the beginning. People said that it was "a good thing that Sylvester Grey had had a home left him, for he never could have earned one."

It was true that Mr. Grey had never been able to make much money, nor to keep what little he did make. "He was as good a man as ever lived," people said again, "but he had no faculty." And to lack "faculty" was, indeed, to lack much.

It puzzled and—of course—worried the com-

munity in which they lived to know "how the Greys got on." Mrs. Grey could have enlightened it had she chosen, but she did not choose. She hardly realized, however, how much of the explanation lay in her own personality, her mere existence. For she—great-hearted, large-souled woman—had "faculty" enough for two; which was fortunate, as she had to contrive for five.

There was a little income—very slender—of her own, and for the rest she "managed." She had been a Winslow, of Mayflower descent, and Aunt Azraella Winslow, Mrs. Grey's brother's widow—herself a Brown—said, with mingled approval and commiseration, that "when one of us, of the old stock, sets a hand to the plough the corn grows."

Sylvester Grey was a dreamer, handsome, frail, sensitive, and clever. Sometimes his teeming brain brought practical results to his family, but these crystallizations of genius were rarer than was comfortable.

Mr. Grey was perfecting a machine for making bricquettes. There was not a very clear notion in his town—Fayre—what this meant, but it was understood vaguely to be a machine which transformed the coal-dust and waste of the mines into solid little bricks for fuel. Aunt Azraella

said "it was exactly like Sylvester to moon over coal-dust while Mary needed kindling-wood."

Oswyth, the oldest girl, whom he had named out of his delight in old Saxon sounds, loved her father tenderly, without understanding him; Prue, petted, pretty little Prue, young for her years, loved him a trifle impatiently, but Roberta, daring, ambitious, active Roberta, loved the dreaming father passionately, and understood that he could not feel the present pinch when visions of a greater good lured him on, understood further that no personal pinch appealed to him very strongly when science led him into her fairyland, and he felt himself her servant. And Roberta alone, of all who loved him, understood the invention to which he was giving his days and many nights, and she believed enthusiastically that some time the bricquette machine would make the family fortune and her father's glory. Yet sometimes her high courage failed, and when the makeshifts and deprivations to which the Greys were condemned bore most heavily upon her she could not help acknowledging—though only to herself—that the happy time was sadly long in coming.

But it was not one of these disheartening days

when she set out to cut the grass, and Rob's heart was as gay within her as a sixteen-year-old heart should be, as she looked out on the field which she meant to make a field of victory.

Her bright, dark eyes, which were always flashing with as many changing expressions as there were minutes in the day, danced with mischief; her rippling mouth and chin—Rob's face was all ripples—looked as though the July breeze were playing with them as it played with the lush grass. With both hands she pushed back her dark hair—full of gleams of red and gold in the sunshine—as she ran down the steps and around the corner to fetch the borrowed lawn-mower, for Rob's hair was forever breaking its orderly braided bounds and turning into rakish odds and ends of curls about her brow and ears. She came back triumphantly, pushing the lawn-mower around the corner, and it rattled on the old flagged walk as she tipped it up on its rear wheels and dodged the box bordering the paths.

"Who's first?" she cried. "Age and muscle, or beauty and babyhood?"

"B. and B.," said Prue, unblushingly owning up to both facts as one well acquainted with the value of her big dark eyes and contrasting veil of golden hair, and one made thoroughly to realize

that she was the youngest. "Give it to me, Rob; I want the first cut."

"'Give me the dagger!' Here you are, then, Lady Macbeth. You'll find the first cut anything but tender—you speak as if it were turkey." And Rob gave the mower-handle into Prue's eager fingers.

Prue ran lightly down the flagged walk with her prize. "I shall begin at the gate," she announced, "so if we don't quite finish it to-day people who go by can see we are beginning to get our grass cut."

Oswyth laughed and groaned. "Finish it to-day! Cut the whole place!" she exclaimed.

Oswyth, with her sweet, placid face, smooth, shining brown hair, calm blue eyes and quiet lips, was unlike either of the others. Pretty she was in her demure way, and no one minded if her soft cheeks were a bit too plump, since their tint was really the "peaches and cream" of which we read. Wythie was a most womanly and wholesome little woman, the sort of girl one sees at first glance must comfort the mother who possesses her.

Prue, undismayed by Wythie's dismay, turned the lawn-mower sharply to the right for her first bold plunge into the grass—and stopped. The

dry, stout stalks resisted her onslaught, and the little girl pushed, pulled back, pushed again, bending over the handle till her flying, golden hair fell forward into the yellowing grass, but the machine would not stir. Prue dropped the handle, straightened her slender form, and, with one movement of both hands, disclosing a face already flushed and speckled by her efforts, threw back her hair and threw up the game.

"I can't budge it, Rob!" she panted. "No one could."

"Want to try, Wythie, or shall I?" asked Rob.

"Want to? I don't quite see why anyone should want to," said Oswyth, "but I suppose we each must, so here goes." And she heroically came forward to take her turn, laying her dimpled and well-cushioned little pink palms on the cross-bar of the handle somewhat gingerly.

She cut a glorious though short swath of four feet in length, happening on more tender grass, and having more strength than Prue, but here she, too, met her Waterloo, for the mower stood still, balking as effectually as all the donkeys in Ireland.

"There's no use in your taking it, Rob," Wythie gasped, after turning hither and thither with no result. "If you cut a few feet it would

be the most that you could do, and what difference would it make out of so much?"

"You don't suppose I'll yield without striking a blow?" cried Roberta, darting at the lawn-mower as if she were no further removed from Samson than his great-granddaughter at most. "I have meant to cut this grass for ages—it shows that," she added, laughing. "Besides, it always matters a lot to me to be beaten. 'Men o' Harlech, in the hollow!' "

Rob began singing the splendid Welsh battle-song as she in turn laid hold of the handle, as if she should not only succeed, but have breath to spare for a war-cry.

Roberta was slender, taller that Oswyth, but her young muscles were strong and well-poised, and to whatever task she essayed she brought an excess of nerve-power that rarely failed to bear her to victory on the very crest of the wave. She attacked the tough grass now with such enthusiasm that the balking lawn-mower yielded to her as most things did, and ran along quite meekly for a little while. But then it stopped, and when it did stop not Cleopatra's galley, buried under centuries of Nile mud, was more motionless than was Aunt Azraella's lawn-mower.

Rob pushed and pulled as both her sisters had

pushed and pulled, losing her patience as she did so.

"No good, Bobs," said Prue, laconically and a trifle maliciously, for the family only nicknamed Rob "Bobs," after Lord Roberts, Kipling's "Bobs Bahadur," in allusion to her indomitable pluck and generalship, and used the name in moments of triumph, of which this was scarcely one.

Roberta pushed away her rebellious locks with the back of a slightly grimy hand.

"If I only had a scythe!" she murmured. "No machine can get through this jungle—I feared as much. I'd mow it if I had a scythe, though!"

"Now, Rob, you mustn't so much as think of one!" said Wythie, decidedly. "You know Mardy would be frantic if you were to swing one just once—you're so reckless! Promise you won't get one."

"I solemnly pledge myself to abstain from all intoxicating and entirely inaccessible scythes," said Rob, holding up both hands. "Where in the world should I get one, Wythie?"

"You always get anything you set your heart on," said Wythie, somewhat loosely, yet speaking from her knowledge of her sister.

"Do I? Then it must be that I set my heart on very little," interjected Rob.

"Would Mr. Flinders cut it?" suggested Prue.

"Even an infant must realize how very sharey Mr. Flinders is in carrying on the place on shares, Prudence, my child," said Rob, gravely. "He may be honest in giving us our third of the vegetables for the use of the land, but I always suspect him of opening the lettuce-heads and rolling them up again to make sure ours haven't more leaves than his."

"Oh, you know Mr. Flinders won't do one thing extra, Prue," said Oswyth, hastily, fearing Prue might resent being called an infant.

"He could have the grass for his horse," said Prue.

" 'A merciful man regardeth the life of his beast,' Prudy," said Rob. "Our grass is half daisy-stalks, half chicory, half dandelions, half some other things—pigweed, probably—and the other half *may* be grass."

Both her sisters laughed. "You always were strong in fractions, Rob," said Oswyth.

"Had to practise the most fractional fractions ever since I was born—why shouldn't I be? There come those new Rutherford boys down the street," said Rob, as three tall figures, arms

locked, marching abreast at a good pace, swung into sight at the head of the street. "They seemed nice when we met them the other day; I wish they'd say they'd cut our grass."

"I thought you scorned to admit boys' superiority in anything, Rob," said Wythie, slyly.

"I don't admit it; I only act on it—if I have to," said Rob.

"Why don't you wish we could afford to hire a man to keep the place decent, like other people, while you're wishing?" asked Prue, rather bitterly.

"Because I don't see the use of wishing for what you can never have," said Rob, quickly.

"We can't be rich—not till Patergrey gets the bricquette machine done—and since it's impossible, why, it's impossible. But it would be perfectly possible for those big creatures to swing scythes and get this grass mown in short order—it would be rather a lark for them. And if it ever does get cut, and I don't keep it short with Aunt Azraella's mower, then it will be because I've forgotten the art of wheedling that beloved lady into lending it."

"How did you get it this time?" asked Oswyth.

"Talked Mayflower and Pilgrim Rock—it never fails," said Rob. "She thinks now there

was a Brewster in her family, and that probably through him she goes back to glory. And you know what Mardy let slip one day about the parental Brown and his remarkably good cobbling! Poor Aunt Azraella! It must be painful to miss the dead in the way she does! Miss having had ancestors to die. Though I don't know why good honest cobbling isn't as good as lots of things they did in colonial days—better than the spelling, for instance. Mercy, those boys are almost here! Is my hair too crazy, and have I grass stains on my nose, Wythie?"

"I don't think it's right to run down our posterity," said Prue, pulling her ribbons and spreading her hair rapidly. "I'm very proud of my descent." And before Oswyth could suggest that she did not mean posterity, three straw hats arose in the air, revealing three flushed, handsome, boyish faces, and three cheery voices called: "Good-afternoon, Miss Oswyth, Miss Rob, Miss Prue."

And the oldest Rutherford boy—he looked nearly eighteen—added: "Are you farming?"

"We're harming—our tempers," cried Rob. "Also a borrowed lawn-mower."

"Won't you come in and rest?" added Oswyth. "You look warm."

"We've been up to the river swimming; it's pretty warm in the sun, walking fast. What's wrong with your tempers? Maybe we'd better keep out." But as he spoke the eldest boy opened the low gate, and they all came in.

Oswyth led the way to the house, and Prue and the youngest Rutherford were dispatched for chairs to set on the lawn, for the little grey house had been built before the day of piazzas. Before the six young people were fairly settled a figure in white appeared in the doorway, smiling invitingly over a big tray laden with glasses, some plain cookies, and the beautiful old glass pitcher, of which the Greys were so proud, full of lemonade and tinkling with ice.

"Oh, that's Mardy all over—always thinking of something for us!" cried Oswyth, as she and Rob sprang forward to relieve their mother of her burden.

CHAPTER TWO

ITS NEIGHBORS

"Won't you come and see the new Rutherford boys, Mardy? We met them at Frances Silsby's the other night," said Roberta, as she took the tray from her mother, while Oswyth took the pitcher.

The three tall lads arose as Mrs. Grey came toward them. "Dear me!" she smiled. "I never would dream you were *new* Rutherford boys if I espied you at a distance, but quite old ones. I am glad to see you."

"We are glad to be here," said the oldest boy, shaking heartily the motherly hand held out to him, and smiling back into the kindly eyes which always won young things, quadruped or biped, and were especially attractive to a motherless lad. "I am Basil Rutherford, this is my second mate, Bruce, and this my little baby brother Bartlemy. Stand up straight, Tom Thumb, and ask Mrs. Grey if she doesn't think you ought to be put

in an incubator. We're so afraid we won't be able to raise him," added Basil, with a tragic glance at the girls.

Fifteen-year-old Bartlemy stood erect to his full six feet one of height, and grinned with the helpless good-nature of a frequent victim.

The Rutherfords were very much alike, brown-skinned, brown-haired, blue-eyed boys, with honesty and kindliness shining from their fine faces. Mrs. Grey made up her mind about them on the spot—as she usually did on meeting strangers. "Nice creatures!" she thought, and laughed as she surveyed Bartlemy.

"I doubt that you could raise him—unaided," she said. And the boys, in their turn, mentally labelled her: "Nice woman."

"But none of you is precisely stunted," added Mrs. Grey, looking up from her own considerable altitude into Basil's, and then into Bruce's face, both of which topped her by several inches.

"Bruce is five feet eleven, good measure, and I am five feet ten," said Basil. "All the Rutherfords grow rank."

"Like our grass," added Roberta, who had been quiet as long as she could be. "There's nothing but length—and poor quality—to the grass, though," she added, with a wicked look, to

which she served an immediate antidote by pouring lemonade into the three rapidly emptying glasses.

"You are new neighbors, I think," said Mrs. Grey, calmly removing a caterpillar from her cuff, and thereby rising high in Bartlemy's estimation, who was an embryo naturalist and scorned nerves.

"We're here for a time—we came three weeks ago. We've taken the Caldwell place, and our guardian put us here with a tutor to get ready for college," said Basil. "I'm in my eighteenth year, but I'd like to wait for Bart if I could. And he's not as stupid as he looks—we think we can enter together in a year; we'd like to keep on side by side as long as we can—we've done it so far."

"How pleasant that is to hear!" cried Mrs. Grey, heartily. "I'm sure you'll gain far more than you lose by waiting. You speak as though you were alone; are you boys all there are in the family?"

"Our father is alive," said Basil, "but he is in the navy, and he's usually about the farthest father I know—just now he's in Japan for two years more. Our mother died when Bart was six. We wish she hadn't—" Basil stopped

short. He had no idea that he was going to say this, but the look that sprang into Mrs. Grey's eyes when he alluded to his mother's loss had slightly upset him.

Mrs. Grey understood. "I wish that she could have stayed to be proud of her three tall sons," she said. "But perhaps Wythie and Rob and Prue can coax you here to share in the mother feeling. We're fond of motherliness in the little grey house, Basil, and we do have good times in it. I must run away, or there will be a sad time in it when the girls come in hungry. They will tell you about our little grey house and its Grey denizens. Will you come often, and help us have good times?" She included the three lads in her warm glance, and quick affection leaped back at her from the three pairs of dark blue eyes. Mrs. Grey mothered everything that came near her, being one of the sort of women with a genuine talent for loving. She longed to bless and protect all creation, and fell to planning as she spoke how to give these motherless lads the womanly sympathy they must want in their setting out on the battle of life.

"Indeed, we will come," said Bruce, speaking suddenly and for the first time.

"You're very good, Mrs. Grey," said Basil,

quietly, but he pressed her hand till it ached, and she knew that he had read aright and would accept her invitation.

"The Greys," began Roberta, in a perfectly dispassionate, narrative tone, as her mother went toward the house, "are exceedingly nice people —I can truly say I know none whom I like better. They are of most ancient, trailing arbutus descent——"

"Rob!" ejaculated Oswyth, reproachfully, not knowing how their new acquaintances would take this nonsense.

"Fact! Isn't the trailing arbutus the Mayflower?" said Rob, unabashed. "It's a more appropriate name, too, because the descendants of the Pilgrims have 'trailed clouds of glory as they came,' like the soul in Wordsworth's Intimations of Immortality—I trust you have heard of Wordsworth, little boys? If you doubt that the Greys are of Mayflower descent on the maternal side, just go ask their aunt-in-law, Azraella Winslow."

"Oh, Rob; how can you?" cried Oswyth, distressed.

"Why, that's true, Wythie; they won't have to ask her, will they?" said Rob, innocently.

"No, don't ask; just listen. Well, the Greys

are poor, but respectable. I hope that they are very respectable, for I can testify from accurate knowledge that they are very poor. They have lots of books, worn shabby, but as good as ever, and the two oldest girls study hard at home—as well as they can—but the youngest they contrive to keep at school. The second daughter is digging away at German alone, and she wishes that everything wasn't divided off into masculine and feminine genders, like a Quaker meeting. However, my brethren, this is not history—only natural history, maybe. To return to the Grey Annals: The dear father Grey is a genius, and he is inventing something so clever and valuable that one day the Greys will be rich. The darling mother Grey is perfect, and a heroine, and nobody on earth could love her enough. The Grey girls help her do the housework, and they economize —economize *terrific!* But they do have fun, and they're happy, and when you came along they were economically trying to cut their own grass, under the rash leadership of the second daughter, and the grass would not succumb to a mower. And that brings my story right up to date—it may be continued in our next issue."

The Rutherford boys evidently understood perfectly how to take Roberta; there was no

occasion for Oswyth's anxiously puckered brow, nor Prue's flushed cheeks and mortified look. All three boys recognized pluck and admired it in the brief outline sketch of the Greys which Rob had given them. Bruce especially, Rob's senior by half a year, as Basil was Wythie's, liked the spirit which she displayed, and which was largely his own sort of courage.

"Our next issue is now ready for the press," he said. "The three Rutherfords—all B's, and so naturally inclined to be busy—were coming down the road as the Grey girls struggled with the stalled mower, and resolved to rescue the brave damsels. High and low they sought till they had found three scythes, or scythes and sickles. Armed with these they marched down upon the grey house, cut the grass with wild hallos, and returned triumphant to the Caldwell place. Come on, Bas; hurry up, Bart; we'll shave the grey place clean."

"Oh, you three long angels!" cried Rob, starting up rapturously as the three Rutherfords arose to carry out Bruce's suggestion with prompt enthusiasm. "I said when I saw you coming that I wished you'd cut this tough grass for us, but I never thought of it again. Wait a minute; I want to speak to Mardy."

She darted to the house and came flying back again from around the rear corner before the others had time to wonder why she had gone.

"It's all right; I knew she'd say yes," Rob panted. "Come to-morrow afternoon, if you really want to do it, and we'll ask Frances down, and have some sort of supper on the newly shaved lawn, among the sweet-smelling grass—even this weedy grass will be fragrant, newly mown. Will you do that ?"

"It will be great!" said the boys, heartily. "Of course we'll come." And they bade the Grey girls good-by, with much satisfaction in their first call.

"Nice girls," said Basil, as they swung up the road, the tallest, Bartlemy, in the middle, an arm resting on each tall brother's shoulder. "Which is the nicest?"

"Hard to say," began Bartlemy, but Bruce cut him short with decision, saying:

"Prue's as pretty as a picture; Oswyth's pretty, too, though not as pretty, and she's a lady, but Rob's a dandy! She's got go and pluck, and did you ever see such a face for crinkling up? I had to watch it; you couldn't tell what it would do next—pretty, she is too—splendid eyes and hair."

The girls echoed the boys' favorable opinion of them, and it was re-echoed that night at bed-time between the large room which Oswyth and Roberta shared and the small one Prue occupied in solitary dignity.

The Greys were early astir on the following morning, for "the mowing-bee of the B's," as Rob called it, entailed extra labor, well worth it though it was.

Supper, when one does not consider expense, is a simple enough problem, but supper when there is little to spend means expenditure of strength instead of money.

Mrs. Grey cut the thinnest slices of her own famous bread, buttered it perfectly, and set it away in the ice-chest while she made egg sandwiches and chopped crispy lettuce out of the garden—lettuce which did not look—in spite of Rob's suspicion—as though the farmer who carried on the Grey garden on shares had "unrolled it to count its leaves."

"Jenny Lind cake," quite good enough for anyone—provided it is eaten very fresh—may be made with one egg. Oswyth beat up two of these cakes, and into one stirred juicy blueberries, while the other she baked in jelly-tins, and iced and filled with caramel filling.

Rob and Prue carried out the table and set it on the lawn. The little grey house was well filled with old blue and white china, odds and ends of pink and white also, queer, dainty sprigged cups and saucers, and rare old pewter which it was Oswyth's joy to keep bright. So the table when decked looked really beautiful, and the girls surveyed it with pride, knowing that more sumptuous suppers than theirs there might be, but few more attractive, and they trusted to their own gayety to secure it one of the jolliest. Frances Silsby came down early. She was Oswyth's and Rob's—more particularly Rob's—one intimate friend; the Grey girls were too sufficient to themselves to need outsiders. She found them hurrying over their dressing, having scrambled the dinner dishes away, for the laborers were sure to arrive early.

The gowns the girls wore were not only simple in themselves, but had done good service and showed in many places their mother's artistic darning. But they were becoming lawns, and when the laughing young faces came up through their fresh ruffles, and the soft, gathered waists settled around the young figures, Oswyth was as sweet in her pale blue, Roberta as brilliant in her rose pink, and Prue as pretty in her snowy white

as new gowns could have made them—and, fortunately, were quite as happy.

The strains of the anvil-chorus floated down the street before Rob and Prue were ready—Oswyth managed always to be ready—and the clash of anvils was marked by the click of scythes. Looking out, the girls saw the Rutherfords, three abreast, as usual, implements over shoulders and flashing in the sunshine, bearing down on the little grey house.

"Oh, hurry, Rob; give me my stick-pin, Wythie—they're coming!" cried Prue.

"Don't wear your stick-pin, Prue; you're sure to lose it out of that thin stuff. Take my bow-knot-pin," said Wythie, proffering it.

"Oh, that old-fashioned thing! Well, I suppose boys won't know—I'll take it, Wythie. Ready, Rob?" cried Prue.

"Would be if my shoe-lacing hadn't come untied, and I stepped on it and broke it. I wouldn't dare tell anyone what I thought of shoe-lacings!" cried Rob, trying to tie the broken string with fingers that quivered with impatience.

"Let me, Rob; you're too crazy," said Frances, kneeling before her friend.

Rob resigned herself with a sigh. "Blessings on thee, little Fan," she said. "Please go down,

Wythie and Prue. Tell the boys we'll be there just as soon as we finish singing 'Blest be the tie that binds.' "

Wythie and Prue departed laughing, and Rob and Frances followed very soon.

"Where shall we begin?" asked Bruce, after greetings were over.

"At the beginning," said Rob, but Wythie, with a glance at her irrepressible sister, said:

"Wherever you like; it really doesn't matter. And we girls are going to rake after you."

" You are little Boazes,
Following your noazes;
We are gleaners, like to Ruth,
Raking hay while in our youth,
Which we think a better line
Than making hay in the sunshine,"

sang Rob, with one of her sudden inspirations.

"Is this going to be a comic-opera, and are we taking part as stage peasants, or really working?" demanded Basil, sternly, though he looked surprised, and his eyes danced.

Bruce threw up his hat in applause, and Bart stared open-mouthed.

"Rob is demented, but not dangerous," said Frances, who had known the boys some time.

"You know I warned you."

"Well, now at it," said Bruce.

"Be sure you don't kill any young ground sparrows," said Wythie, anxiously.

"Oh, let me go ahead and scare up the mothers if there are any nests, then we'll see where they fly up," cried Prue.

"Go ahead, Paula Revere; rouse the inhabitants," said Bartlemy.

So the mowing began, Prue preceding, her cloud of yellow hair floating over her white gown as she scuffed her feet through the long grass, the boys in their white-flannel shirts, turned away at the necks, swinging their long scythes in their strong, long arms, and Oswyth, Frances, and Rob fluttering after them in their floating summer gowns, raking industriously. It was as pretty a picture as any figure in the cotillon and quite as much fun.

Presently they all began to sing, Prue and Frances in their high sopranos, Oswyth in her sweet, low soprano, Rob in her soft alto, Basil a high tenor, Bruce, a barytone, and Bart something he sincerely believed was a heavy bass. People driving by stopped to look and listen, and Mr. Grey sat over his models in a happy dream, as the sound wafted in to him, while Mrs. Grey

could hardly keep her mind on the cold meat she was slicing and the biscuits she was making for tea.

"Bless their dear, happy hearts!" she thought. "How little it takes to rejoice them. They won't know if I go without some little things to make up the trifling cost of their bee."

The work was only too short, it seemed to the girls, though perhaps the boys were glad to stop when Mrs. Grey came out on the steps at five and struck the brass-bowl, which was the Greys' Japanese way of summoning the family.

They had not attempted to mow the orchard, nor the land running down toward the back road, out of sight, but all that showed from the street was gloriously shaven, and Rob had run the lawn-mower over it, enjoying its speed.

The supper was not merely pretty. "It was distinguished," Frances told her friends later; she had a feminine instinct for old china.

"But it was not merely distinguished—it was extinguished—they ate every crumb," Rob retorted. "And so it must have been good."

It *was* good; even in a community of skilful housewives, Mrs. Grey's cooking was famous. The dishes were tucked away in a big wash-tub till morning—an indulgence the Greys some-

times allowed themselves—and "the little busy B's bee," as the name was now abbreviated, ended with the girls nestled together on the steps, while the boys disposed of their length of limb lower down, and they sang again while the little July moon dipped down before them, and disappeared in the west, and the stars came out.

Then Frances arose to go, and the Rutherford boys arose, too, to take her safely home, and then go their own ways.

"We're no end grateful to you for giving us the very nicest party we ever went to," said Basil to Mrs. Grey as he bade her good-night.

"Oh, as to that," Rob remarked, "one good cut deserves another."

"Come as often as you like, my dears; we shall love to have you," said Mrs. Grey, who, on this second, longer seeing, had taken the Rutherfords quite into her motherly heart.

"Did you have a good time, children?" she asked as the girls kissed her good-night, Oswyth last of all, as she always contrived to be.

"Beautiful, Mardy," said Wythie. "I really think, as Basil said, it was as nice a party as I ever went to."

"And I think they are glorious boys," said

Prue. "I'm so glad we've found such nice new friends."

"So am I; it's as fortunate for the three lassies as it is for the three lads," said Mrs. Grey.

"And I am glad the grass is cut, you unpractical little girls, Mardy, Wythie, and Prudy, all three of you," said Rob, looking out with much satisfaction on the smooth lawn as she pulled down the shade and lighted her bedtime candle.

CHAPTER THREE

ITS MASTER

The morning after the bee Oswyth was washing dishes and Prue was wiping them, while Roberta polished the stove, whistling in cheerful oblivion of the large polka-dot of blacking adorning her cheek.

Mrs. Grey came in from the dining-room, which she had been brushing up, her dust-pan in one hand, her whisk-broom in the other, held straight out like parentheses, and said, without preliminary, out of her busy thoughts: "I don't see, dear girls, what we shall do this fall unless we have an extra hundred dollars. And still less do I see where we are to get even an extra five dollars. I have been lying awake nights contriving, but no suggestion comes. The coal money went to repair the roof, and bought the flour and other things—all necessities—but it must be made up, and I cannot see how. Besides, you need, each of you, warm coats this

winter. I suppose Prue can wear Wythie's old one, but Wythie and Rob must have something."

Prue made a wry face, but Rob cried: "Sufficient to the season is the coating thereof, Mardy. Winter coats don't appeal to me strongly this sultry morning."

"Don't worry, Mardy; I am sure we can manage," said Wythie, lovingly. "But coal—well, I don't see how that can be dodged."

"No, nor paid for," sighed her mother. "Ah, well! We have lived for a good many years, and through several crises which in prospective looked impenetrable, so I suppose we shall find a way."

"Like Sentimental Tommy," added Rob. "I'm sure of it."

"Perhaps papa will get into business by that time," suggested Prue.

"And throw up the invention?" cried Rob, quickly. "That *would* be foolish!"

"I wish I could do something to help," said Oswyth, sadly. "I wonder if I ought not to go in town this fall, even if I could only get a place in a store."

"And earn but six dollars a week, out of which you would have to pay your board? We have

gone over that many times, dearie, and decided you are more useful here, even if I could allow a young girl like you to go alone into a city boarding-house," said her mother. "You are such a help to me, daughter, that I could not spare you, and you must frame your wish another way."

Oswyth looked pensively at her dimpled hands as she held them up over the dish-pan and let the water drip off of each of her ten fingers.

"I am going to do something perfectly original right here in Fayre; it is going to bring us money, and be a triumph of several sorts. I have no idea what it will be, but that's my plan," announced Rob. And as her family laughed at a "plan" so very loosely constructed, she waved her brush dramatically for further elucidation, and upset the saucer of blacking, spattering its contents broadcast over the spotless, though worn, oil-cloth covering the floor.

"Now, that's just like you, Rob," said Prue, severely. "You're more likely to do mischief with your schemes than to help much."

"That is hardly kind or true, Prudy," said her mother. "Rob's schemes usually come to something practically helpful. She's a daring girl, but not a rash one. Never mind, Rob dear; the

blacking will easily wipe up. I shouldn't be at all surprised if you hit on a way to get us into a land flowing with milk and honey some day. But you are only sixteen now, and we must find a way to keep us alive in the desert while you finish growing up."

A long shadow fell across the door, and the four feminine members of the family looked up to greet its head with a smile. Clad in dark blue serge that hung loosely on his thin frame, Mr. Grey stood surveying the group, smiling back, but not entering. He was tall, handsome, his eyes dark and dreamy, yet with an eager expression in them, as if they had vainly sought that on which they could never rest. He was startlingly pale, except for a bright red spot high on each hollow cheek. Roberta more closely resembled him than either of the other girls, but in expression her rippling, alert brilliancy was wholly unlike the far-off, vague look of the father she worshipped.

"Oh, Patergrey," cried Roberta, springing to meet him, forgetful of her recent disaster and blackened hands, and giving him the caressing title—pronounced as one word—which she had long ago conferred upon him. "Where have you been 'one morning, oh, so early, my beloved,

my beloved?'" Rob ended in the refrain of a song she loved.

"I went to the post-office, and I stopped at Mrs. Bonell's—she waylaid me," said Mr. Grey.

"You're keeping back something!" cried Rob, holding up her forefinger in a reproach that would have been more impressive if the forefinger had been whiter.

"He has a basket behind him," cried Prue, darting upon him. "What's in the basket, papa?"

"'Ware, Prue! Marked: Fragile. Don't handle," teased her father, holding Prue off with one hand. "Mrs. Bonell is going away."

"Where? For long?" asked Mrs. Grey, as Wythie exclaimed: "Oh, I am sorry."

"To Europe, for many months," said Mr. Grey. "And I've told her we would take a boarder."

"A boarder! Why, Sylvester!" cried his wife.

"I really thought you would like this one," said Mr. Grey. "It seemed very hard to say no. You see Mrs. Bonell said there was no one else in whom she would feel sufficient confidence to intrust this boarder to them, and when such a pretty young creature as she is flatters a weak man so, how can he resist? She says she knows

we would never fail to the very end of his life to take care of him. She feels sure we are not the cruel sort of folk who would go away and leave him to shift for himself, nor put him out in the cold on winter nights when he had been in the warm house all day, and if he were sick that we would nurse him lovingly, and if he were suffering and past recovery we would chloroform him still more lovingly—in short, that we were ideal guardians of a cat. So I felt obliged to accept a rôle nature had evidently designed us to fill."

"A cat! Oh, bless you!" cried three rapturous girl voices, and Wythie added: "It isn't her lovely, white little Billee?"

"We have only seven cats taking their meals here now," suggested Mrs. Grey.

"My dear, those are humble dependents; of those I hope we shall always have a store, for I want the little grey house to be the asylum for homeless creatures it was in my mother's day," said Mr. Grey, busying himself with the basket-strap. "But a cat, all our own, and one of the family, we have lacked since the day when poor old Nellie Grey went to the reward of cats of blameless character. Yes, Oswyth; this is, indeed, snow-white Billy, and I consider it a great honor that his mistress will intrust us with her

pet." Mr. Grey had unfastened the strap by this time, and, lifting the basket-cover, displayed a half-grown kitten, snowy white and odorous of violet sachet, cowering, trembling, with dilated eyes, on the pale blue knitted shawl with which his loving mistress had tried to soften his departure.

"Now, don't jump at him," said Mr. Grey, who understood and loved all animals. "Remember, a cat is the most nervous creature on earth, and this one is dreadfully frightened."

"I've often petted him at Mrs. Bonell's; he may remember me," said Oswyth. "Let me take him." Very gently she raised the downy creature, who immediately put his forepaws around her neck and clung to her, his poor little heart thumping wildly against Wythie's throat. "Dear Billy, you gentle, sweet, little kitten," Wythie murmured, sitting down to rock him, while Rob and Prue looked on longingly.

"You don't object, Lady Grey?" said Mr. Grey. "He's so much of a pet already, and so very white, he can't bother you."

"Why, you know, Sylvester, I'm quite as much of a goose about pets as the children—or as you are," laughed Mrs. Grey, and so Billy was adopted.

"I'd like to call him Kiku—that's Japanese for chrysanthemum. I wonder if Mrs. Bonell would mind? It would be so lovely to say: 'O Kiku-san,' when we called him," said Rob.

"She would never mind," said Prue, while Wythie began to sing to the old lullaby tune of Greenville: "O Billy-san, O Kiku-Billy-san; O Kiku-san, O Kiku-Billy-san." As she rocked to and fro in perfect content, frightened, puzzled little Billy shut his eyes and clung to her, his heart beating less tumultuously as he began to realize that here, too, were gentle hearts and hands.

"I want you when you can come, Rob, my son," said Mr. Grey, going toward the room which had been set apart for his special uses. It was a well-worn, but well-wearing, joke between Roberta and her father that she was his son Rob, his mainstay and dependence. "And I'd like to be able to see you when you come," he added, as a parting shot. "Just now you are in partial eclipse from blacking."

Rob laughed and ran upstairs. Presently she returned, and went to her father's room, carefully closing the door behind her.

It was a curious place, a mixture of study, library, workshop, and laboratory. It had been

built for the kitchen of the little grey house when it was new, a hundred years ago. Its walls were wainscoted to half their height in panels of grained and varnished wood. The fireplace was made of narrow panels, with little cupboards above the high, narrow, wooden mantelpiece, and the handles of these cupboard-doors were tiny brass knobs. The old rush-bottomed chairs sitting around the walls, and the tables as well, were littered with papers. Between the windows, where the light was strongest, sat a common kitchen table, and on it stood a model of the bricquette machine, and models of its component parts. Two tall bookcases, one filled with scientific and mechanical books, the other with novels, essays, and poetry, stood opposite these models, and across the room on another table standing close to the sink and small portable stove, were scattered chemical apparatus.

Rob was perfectly at home in these queer surroundings; among them she had spent a great deal of her childhood, creeping, "mousy-quiet," to sit on a stool by her oblivious father, her chattering tongue silenced and her busy brain full of loving awe.

Her father looked up now as she entered. "Ah, Rob, come in," he said. "I want to go over

this with you. You read to me what I have written here, while I move the model according to those directions, and see if I have made it clear and correct."

"Yes, Patergrey," said Rob, taking the closely written manuscript which he handed her, well used to this sort of service. And then she began to read.

Sometimes, not fully understanding what she read, Rob paused and watched her father manipulate the model, and refer to its sections, until she comprehended perfectly what the words were intended to convey. So far from this interest on her part annoying the inventor, it delighted him, and largely explained what was unquestionably true—that Rob was his favorite daughter.

"You will be as well able to exhibit this as I shall when it is done, Rob, my son," Mr. Grey laughed, well pleased, as, her point cleared up, Roberta read on, pausing only at a word from her father. "Wait a moment, Rob; this isn't quite right." "Mark that with the blue pencil, Rob; I'll say that more briefly." "Slowly, Rob; my fingers won't move as fast as your tongue."

At last they were through, and Mr. Grey

threw himself into his big chair with the shabby cushions, sighing contentedly.

"That's all right, Rob," he said. "Next autumn will see the machine completed—December at the latest, I hope. What a help you are, Rob, my son!"

"It's a comfort to hear you say that, like a sort of grace, every time we get through, Patergrey," said Rob. "But if I am a help to you, I wonder if I can get you to do something for me?"

"Yes, you know you can," said Mr. Grey, anticipating a request to be taken fishing, or to go for a long stroll in the twilight. But Rob, who would never allow anyone to insinuate that her father could accomplish more than he did, had other plans in her teeming brain. With a sensitive flush, fearing to wound her father, she said:

"Didn't you tell me, Patergrey, that a magazine had asked you to write a special article for it on something or other scientific, and offered you quite a sum of money if you'd do it?"

"Why, yes," said Mr. Grey, startled into animation by the unexpected question. "On fuels and means of heating and lighting in the future, and the world's storage of such fuel; they thought I should be prepared for such an article —as I am. Yes, they asked me—why?"

"Because dear Mardy is worried over present prospects; she lies awake planning, and can't see her way out—she told us so this morning," said Rob, bravely. "She says we must have an extra hundred dollars—and she has no idea where it can come from. We've used up the coal money—you know she divides her poor little pennies into piles for different things—and if we get coal late it will cost more, besides, how can we get it later any better than now? So I never said a word to the rest, but I thought of the article, and I made up my mind I'd get the dear daddy to put a wee bit of his cleverness on paper, and surprise the blessed Lady Grey by giving her her hundred—do you suppose it could be as much as that, Patergrey?"

"They offered me a hundred dollars for three thousand words," said her father, adding quickly, as Rob clapped her hands rapturously: "But it will take my mind off the invention, Rob, and I don't want to delay that a day. Something seems to impel me—compel me is better—to finish it as soon as I can, and anything that retards it is a mistake, my dear."

"But you are all prepared—you said so, Patergrey—and you are so clever you can do it in a week," coaxed Rob, getting up to kneel beside

her father, and crinkling her flexible face into a maze of irresistible puckers, as if he were a little child.

Her father laughed. "A week, you silly puss! Three days, at the outside," he said.

Rob cried out triumphantly: "Then you can't say no! Only three days! It can't make much difference with the machine, and isn't it worth three days' delay to relieve Mardy darling's mind? Poor Mardy! She's so brave and cheerful, but, oh, she does have to squeeze hard to keep us all fed and housed."

To Rob's distress her father dropped his head on his arms, laid over the back of the chair, and groaned.

"You're right, Roberta. It makes me sick at heart to think of what it has cost her to be so faithfully, patiently loving with me all these years. Poor, bright, pretty Mary Winslow, who might have shone in any setting! Yes, child, I'll do the article—set about it to-day. I know I make life hard for her, but I do my best. Some day you'll all see, Rob, I did my best."

Tears were raining down Roberta's cheeks. "Papa, Patergrey, I know, I know all about it! Why do you say that to me?" she cried. "And

Mardy doesn't have a hard time—she'd never forgive me if I let you say that! She loves you so much that it would have been cruel to have given her all the world, without you."

"How can you understand that, Roberta?" asked her father, startled by the girl's insight.

"Because anyone feels that way when they love someone," replied Rob. "Wouldn't I rather be Roberta Grey, your daughter, than the richest girl in the world with another father? Don't grieve, Patergrey. It's all right for all the Greys, and we'll show all those people who talk and don't know what they're talking about, we'll show them—you and I and the bricquette machine—some day, won't we?"

"I hope so, Rob, I hope so," said her father. "But I can't help wondering, little daughter. I sometimes feel as though I were losing my hold. But, yes; we will prove ourselves right, Rob, my son," he added, straightening himself, the red spot burning under his glowing eyes. "And in the meantime you shall have the article this week, Rob. Tell your mother not to worry; my article on fuel shall give us ours. Tell her you woke me up to my duty."

"I'll tell her nothing about it, Patergrey," said Rob. "You shall hand her the hundred dollars

and surprise her when it comes. And don't say I woke you up to your duty. It makes me sound perfectly horrid, and feel worse than I sound. Now I must go help get dinner. Thank you, Patergrey." And Rob kissed her father, and slipped away, glad to have succeeded, yet with the vague pain at her heart which of late she often carried with her from one of these pleasant mornings with the dear, pathetic father.

CHAPTER FOUR

ITS RELATIVES

Although Fayre was a small Connecticut town not two hours away from New York, the Greys followed the simple country practice of dining at mid-day. It was much pleasanter, when the mistress of the house and its daughters constituted also its service, for them to be able to draw a long breath when the forenoon's labors were over, and feel that nothing more onerous and damaging to gowns than preparations for tea lay before them. The last dish had been put away, and the delicate towels hung out in the sunshine to dry. Most human lots have their compensations, and Mrs. Grey found the remembrance of her sweet, fine dish-cloths consolatory to her amid the hardships of household drudgery.

Rob's brief depression in parting from her father that morning had passed away. Rob's heart had not been fashioned to sink under weight; she refused to believe in trouble until

it forced itself upon her, and then she still refused to salute it by its proper name. Now the girls and their mother had dropped into chairs around the dining-room table, and were enjoying that most restful stolen rest, to which one has no right at that particular moment. No one in the family was quite presentable if anyone should come, and it was already two o'clock; they all felt that they had no right to linger there, still they lingered. Yet what they called their "uniform" was pretty and becoming. Each sister wore a plain, dark blue gingham, straight-hemmed skirt and blouse waist, with a deep sailor collar, feather-stitched in white, as were the cuffs. The collars opened low, and were tied with a narrow white-linen knotted tie, and the fresh young faces and white throats rose from the dark cotton, looking prettier than usual for the plainness of their setting. The duplicates of these gowns hung, fresh and newly ironed, upstairs; it was the Greys' working regalia, "the badge of their labor union," Rob said. The warmth of the day, and of getting and clearing away dinner, had made every one of Rob's unruly locks stray out over neck and brow, and curl up at their ends. She sat with her elbows on the table, her face in her hands, and Prue sat in pre-

cisely the same position opposite her, both enjoying the unconventional pose, as they did loitering in their working dresses when the old dining-room clock had struck two. Oswyth leaned back in her chair, her small, slippered feet thrust out before her, one arm dangling over the chair-back. Mrs. Grey rocked cosily by the window on the breeze side, and white Kiku-san, who was beginning to adjust himself to his new home, though he still approached strange objects with body elongated and with many nervous backward starts, sat now with his head on one side, watching the shadows on the floor of the swaying tendrils of the honeysuckle around the window.

"Oh, my heart, the Angel!" exclaimed Rob, suddenly, in panic-stricken tones. They all looked up. Across the newly shorn grass approached a figure, not very tall, but exceedingly awesome, and the Greys knew that they were caught.

"Aunt Azraella!" murmured Wythie, uncrossing and drawing in her feet, and bringing her arm to the front to join its mate.

With some incomprehensible notion of endowing her daughter with a celestial name Aunt Azraella's mother, the late Mrs. Brown, had christened her by a feminine form, of her own

invention, of the name of the dread angel of death. Prue had once caustically suggested that it must have been because Mrs. Brown had foreseen "that she was going to turn out so deadly." There were a great many hard points about the Greys' life, but if any one of them was asked suddenly which was her greatest trial she would probably have answered unhesitatingly: "Living so near Aunt Azraella."

The girls speculated privately on what she could have been in her youth to have made their mother's brother—the Uncle Horace whom they did not remember—marry her. She was one of those persons born with a sure conviction of their fitness and mission to set the world right. She oversaw the Greys' expenditures, commented unfavorably on their methods of economy, condemned severely almost all their pleasures as extravagant, was wholly intolerant of what she called "Sylvester Grey's shiftlessness," and was thoroughly convinced that she could bring up three girls far more strictly, and far better than her sister-in-law—and as to the first half of her proposition she was doubtless correct. Yet she was not an ill-intentioned woman—Rob said that was the worst of it, "because if she meant to be horrid you could bid her to go to"—and in her

peculiar way she really admired and was fond of her late husband's sister.

"I wonder what we've done now," said Rob, out of her past experience, and taking a rapid mental survey of events since her aunt had visited them, in a vain attempt to discover a peg on which she could hang blame.

Mrs. Winslow appeared in the doorway before anyone could reply, revealing herself portly, with a nose that dented in at the tip sharply on each side above its widespread nostrils; the hair, eyes, and skin of this estimable lady were of a uniform drabness.

"Good-afternoon," she said, entering. "Do you mean to say you aren't dressed? It's quarter—no, seventeen minutes after two! I make it a point to have myself and my house in perfect order every day at half-past one—Elvira understands that I demand that of her."

"We can't get our girls to grasp the idea, aunt," said Rob, a remark her mother hastily covered by saying: "It was so pleasant here we loitered, yielding weakly to temptation, Azraella. Take this chair; there's a refreshing little breeze at this window."

"What's that? Not a new cat! Now, Mary, how can you be so indulgent to these girls?

Don't you know it costs something to feed animals? It may not be much, but you must often give them scraps you could use. It's just in those small leakages that your management fails —they keep you poor," said Aunt Azraella, sinking into the rocking-chair and removing her severe garden-hat.

"We have a third of a cow, you know, aunt," said Rob, gravely, "and none of us likes milk. We get more than three quarts a day, so it leaves us enough for charity. And there are crumbs that fall from a poor man's table as well as from a rich one's, Aunt Azraella. They're smaller, and not such fat crumbs, but our loving and grateful friends take them in the spirit in which they're given."

"They ought to go to the chickens," said Mrs. Winslow.

"Our arrangement with Mr. Flinders in regard to the chickens was that he was to feed them, and we provide only the space for them— and grasshoppers in summer," added Mrs. Grey, with a smile. "We have all the eggs we need, but not nearly as many as he keeps for his own use. I think this little white kitten won't impoverish us."

"You had a party yesterday, I noticed," said

Aunt Azraella, dropping the subject of pets and pouncing on the one which she had come over especially to discuss, in what Rob felt was rather like a feline way of pouncing on a mouse.

"Yes. Did you see what a pleasant one it was?" asked Mrs. Grey. "We had a good time, and accomplished something besides."

"I saw three tall men here and a girl—I supposed it was the Silsby girl," said Aunt Azraella. "And I saw you had tea on the lawn."

" 'The three men' were the three Rutherford lads—aren't they tall creatures?" laughed Mrs. Grey. "But they are only about six months older, each, than our girls. Such nice, kindly, well-bred lads they seem to be!"

"Where were you, Aunt Azraella? Why didn't you come in? We didn't see you," said Rob, with apparent innocence.

"I was at home, too busy to gad," said her aunt. "I got a few late currants, Mary, and I put them up—they made nine glasses of jelly. I was short this year. You did not see me, Roberta, because I was not in sight. I have no time to waste. But I saw you had a party, and I made out the tea on your lawn with my field-glasses."

Rob had known this quite well before she was

told, but she dearly loved to extract the information for the benefit of the others each time that their aunt came to reproach them for misdeeds which she had discovered by a method of which she seemed never to be ashamed, but which filled the Grey girls with wrath or amusement, according to their mood at the moment.

Now Prue choked, and Oswyth's lips twitched, but Roberta looked Aunt Azraella straight in the eyes, her own brilliant dark ones blankly quiet.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, as if enlightened. "Jelly-glasses and field-glasses, currants with an a, and currents with an e—currant jelly and current news! Didn't we look pretty, aunt? We had out lots of the old china and pewter."

This was pure malice on Rob's part, for Mrs. Winslow coveted the Winslow heirlooms, to which as a childless widow, Winslow but by marriage, she had no claim.

Mrs. Grey glanced at her second daughter. "If some of us don't make ourselves presentable we shall be caught in our uniforms by someone whom we mind seeing more than we do aunty, children," she said. "Suppose we take turns in dressing, and Rob and Prue go first?"

Roberta arose. "Shall I wear my bridle,

Mardy?" she inquired. "Not very hard to see through, the Lady Grey, is she?" she added to her younger sister when they were in the hall.

"I really don't see, Mary, I do *not* see, how, situated as you are, you can reconcile it with your conscience to give lawn-parties," said Aunt Azraella, severely. "These girls ought to understand that they cannot expect the sort of youth they would have if their father were other than he is. They ought to help you; not waste money in entertaining."

"Azraella, Azraella," cried Mrs. Grey, stung to impatience by this double thrust at her husband and her children. "You really should acquire the habit of learning facts before you form opinions. No girls were ever more cheerfully helpful and ready to do without the good times other girls have than mine are. Roberta tried—dear child, she is always trying something desperate—to cut the overgrown grass, since we had no man to do it. She borrowed your lawn-mower for it, but the grass was too long to use it. The Rutherford boys volunteered to the rescue, and mowed all this great lawn. What you took for an extravagant lawn-party was in reality a mowing-bee.

"I hope Roberta did not ruin my lawn-mower;

I had no idea she wanted it for that tough grass, or I would never have lent it—she ought to have known better," said Aunt Azraella, shifting her attack.

"We didn't hurt it at all, aunt; we tried it, and when it wouldn't work we gave up at once," said Oswyth, beginning to tremble. She never could vent her wrath in lingual fireworks, as Rob did, and was sorely torn by the necessity of bottling it up. Now she longed to say that they would have been glad if their aunt had lent her burly Aaron, who was a great friend to the Grey girls, and would have come willingly, to cut the grass, but even Rob would hardly have ventured this.

"I need someone to help Elvira," said Mrs. Winslow, going off on a tangent—she had "irruptions of the brain," Rob said. "I have been thinking that I would take one of your girls, Mary. I would give her twelve dollars a month, and she could come home every night, and it would be time enough if she got up on the hill by half-past eight each morning. It would give you a little extra income. Prue would answer, if you can't spare Oswyth—I won't have Roberta."

Before Mrs. Grey could reply Oswyth sprang

up, her face dark red to her hair, and saying in a choking voice, "Excuse me, mother; I must dress," ran upstairs without waiting for a dismissal.

"Goodness, Wythie, what is it now?" cried Rob, as her sister flung open the chamber-door with a bang. "You look mad."

"Mad? Mad?" echoed gentle Wythie. "I'm furious! Don't you go back there, either of you. She's more maddening than ever. She wants me or Prue for a servant to help Elvira—she won't have Rob."

"Why, I don't believe she will," drawled Rob, with a flash of her bright eyes. "Yet I would be good for her; a discipline, not unlike a scourge."

Prue thrust her head through the door between her room and the girls' chamber. She could not raise it because she was combing her fly-away locks over her face, forward from the neck, having heard that this treatment made the hair more fluffy. From the golden veil in which this enveloped her she spoke: "Wants me for a servant to help Elvira? Did you say that, Wythie? What did Mardy say?"

"I didn't wait to hear—I didn't dare. I felt as though I should have apoplexy," said Wythie. "She had been saying things before that."

"She's always saying things—and seeing things," remarked Rob. "The worst of the little grey house is that it stands where the hill-house overlooks it."

Prue, inarticulate for a moment from the indignity offered the pretty self which she did not underestimate, found her voice. "Well, let her wait till she gets me," she said, in a tone so sarcastic as to make up for the feebleness of the retort.

"We've made a 'sloka' since we came upstairs —Prue and I," said Rob. "We are going to sing it when Aunt Azraella gets too unbearable; it's better to sing things about her than to preserve your rage, as she does her sharp currants."

"I'm afraid it isn't very nice," said Wythie, doubtfully.

"Yes, it is; it's a lovely 'sloka.' Of course, you can't be sure it's nice till you've heard it. Just listen." And Rob sang softly:

" There is a queer person in Fayre,
Who trails fury and wrath everywhere;
She's a dragon-like breath,
So they named her for death,
And when she comes calling: Beware!
We love our dear Aunt Azraella,
For she lectures us—every Grey feller!

And she spies with her glass
What does not come to pass,
While our feelings we scarcely dare tell her."

Wythie could not help laughing, and felt better for it.

"Now, you and Prue, sit under the tree where you can warn Mardy if anyone comes to see her. I'm going for a stroll," announced Rob, and before Wythie could object she had disappeared without wasting time on the empty ceremonial of donning a hat.

Straight through the old orchard she went, climbed the fence, and took her course down the back road. She had a definite end in view. Three-quarters of a mile away lived a second cousin of her father, a blind woman, whom the Greys had from their childhood called "Cousin Peace," though her name was Charlotte.

Often, when life and herself got too tumultuous for Rob, she ran down for a breath of Cousin Peace's atmosphere. She saw the pale, calm face she sought at the window as she drew near the house, and, opening the gate, she went up and leaned on the sill without speaking.

Miss Charlotte Grey's thin right hand went out to touch her head. "Ah, Roberta dear, how

are you to-day?" she said, as she felt the soft tendrils of curls which she had never seen.

"Pretty horrid, thank you, Cousin Peace," said Rob, penitently, "but very well."

"Anything wrong?" asked "Cousin Peace."

"Nothing new, nothing much, and everything," said Rob, with Delphic ambiguity. "We're not any richer, and Mardy's been worried, but we've found some nice new boy friends. Still, Aunt Azraella's there this afternoon, rather more trying than ordinarily—she even made Wythie furiously mad. So you can see whether good or bad prevails."

"Your Aunt Azraella must not prevail—to anger you, dearie," said Cousin Peace, gently. "She is one of those unfortunate souls that can't see any difference in size between her mountains and her mole-hills. She always reminds me of the old fable of the astronomer who had a fly in his telescope, and thought a new world had rolled into space in the field his glass swept. It is quite as bad as being totally blind to lack perspective, I sometimes think, Robin. If you once grasp the fact that only essentials are essential, dear, you will have mastered the secret of good and happy living. And your Aunt Azraella is not essential," she added, with

a merry twist of her lips, as she turned her closed eyes toward Rob, and laughed so blithely that it was evident that she did not want to preach, and that all Rob's visits to her distant cousin were not serious ones.

"She is certainly not essential to my happiness, dear, peaceful cousin," said Rob. "You haven't heard the Iliad of How the Grass Was Cut. Let me relate it." And, seating herself on the upper step, just outside the window, Rob began to tell in her most dramatic manner the story of their new acquaintances and how they had befriended the Greys. As she listened Miss Charlotte's pale face flushed with laughing, and she grew so much younger that it was perfectly clear that Rob not only received, but gave in these visits to the blind woman.

When she arose to go Miss Grey held out both hands and kissed Rob, who had to hold aside the syringa bushes growing unchecked before the window, in order to reach her cousin.

"Dear Robin, come soon again; you do me as much good as your blithe feathered namesake," said Cousin Peace, holding the strong, brown hands a moment between her white ones.

"I'll come; you couldn't keep me away, Cousin Peace," said Rob. "You do *me* more good than

an organ and a stained-glass window, and they help me to feel angelic more than anything I know. Oh, why aren't all relations like you?"

And Rob departed, soothed and heartened as she always was by blind Cousin Peace, who saw so clearly. She went up the pretty back road as the shadows were beginning to lengthen, and reached home to find Aunt Azraella gone, and the kitchen of the little grey house filled with the song of the kettle, and the homely, but comforting odor of toast, as her mother and Wythie stepped briskly about getting tea, and Prue in the dining-room sang as cheerily as the kettle while she was setting the table.

CHAPTER FIVE

ITS BLITHE DAYS

Mr. Grey fulfilled his promise to Roberta. He wrote the article which had been requested of him by the magazine, and read it to its prime instigator before sending it off. She found it one of the most remarkable productions of the human pen, nor was shaken, but rather strengthened in her opinion by the fact that she understood very little of what it was all about.

Then followed a ten days of waiting for the result, which seemed—to one of the conspirators, at least—the longest ten days she had ever passed. It was so hard not to drop a hint of the great expectations to Wythie and Prue, still harder not to suggest to Mardy that the anxious line between her eyes had no especial reason for being there, since deliverance and the equivalent of the winter supply of coal was at hand. At last Prue brought up the longed-for letter from her early morning expedition to the post-office, and gave it, quite unsuspectingly, to her father.

"Rob, Roberta, come here," called Mr. Grey, in a few moments, and, feeling quite sure of the reason for her summons, Rob flew to him, nearly upsetting little white Kiku-san on the way.

Her father looked boyishly delighted as she entered his quarters—Mr. Grey would not allow the word "den" to be applied to his room. "See, Rob, my son," he cried, triumphantly brandishing aloft the magic slip of paper. "Your worthless father is not quite useless, is he? They shall find out some day that Sylvester Grey is not the drone they think him."

Rob had seized the check, and was gloating over it ecstatically.

"Take that to your mother, child, and tell her to cease worrying; that there is the money she needed, and that when the machine is finished she shall never again know what anxiety is," continued the dreamer, magnificently. "And it will be done soon—in a few months, Rob—and while it is getting placed I will turn my attention to this sort of thing, and we shall be very comfortable while waiting to be rich. Why, when my mind is free, Roberta, it is a low estimate to reckon that I can make a hundred dollars a month by my pen."

"Of course you can, Patergrey," echoed in-

experienced Rob, confidently. "Will it take long to place the bricquette machine when it is done?"

"Oh, as to that, no one can tell—probably not, but there are delays always liable to occur in the disposing of a patent. But this one is in such demand—no, I think there will hardly be much delay. Not that it matters seriously—the important thing is to get it off my mind; that will leave me free, as I said. But run along and take this check to your mother, Rob; she must be gladdened as soon as possible. Just wait till I make it payable to her order," added Mr. Grey, seating himself at the table.

"Indeed, I am not going to take it to her, Patergrey," declared Rob. "You must give it to her yourself; what have I to do with it?"

"Oh, I can't," said Mr. Grey, flushing and hanging back like a school-boy. "You have a great deal to do with it. Take it, and tell her you got me to write the article, there's a good fellow!"

"Isn't it queer how almost all American little boys are ashamed to do nice things? But this little boy must do as he's bid," laughed Rob, feeling, as she often did, as though this tall, unpractical, lovable dreamer were actually a little child.

"I'll tell you what we'll do: You go out and sit on the steps, Patergrey, and I'll go tell Mardy there are several tons of coal and some other things outside, and send her out to see. And she'll find you there. And when she comes, you'll hand her the check, and after she gets her breath we'll have a jubilation. Run along, little Patergrey; we don't get hundred-dollar checks often enough to take this one in a commonplace, every-day way—we must make a celebration of it."

Without giving her father time for further demur, Roberta bundled him out of the door, putting her hands on his shoulders and pushing him before her like a particularly active motor-engine. Laughing and breathless, she got him into the ancient wooden arm-chair which stood on the tiny stoop, and ran away in triumph to fetch her mother.

"Mardy, Mardy," she cried, rapturously, "coal and other vitals are here—just come out! Go look, and 'drive that shadow from thy brow!' "

"Rob, my dear, are you quite crazy?" cried Mrs. Grey.

"Only go see! This time it is not the patient you must examine for her sanity, but the front stoop. Drop your duster and obey, Lady

Grey!" cried Rob, seizing her mother around the waist and waltzing her irresistibly toward the door.

"Rob, you're a scamp," gasped Mrs. Grey—all that she had breath to say—as she kissed Rob's glowing cheek, and yielded.

"Wait a minute, Wythie; don't go out there, Prue. Let Mardy see the luck first alone, and then we'll all go, and make a time of it," cried Rob, getting between the other girls and the door.

"What is it all about, Rob?" cried Wythie. "Is there really coal there?" added Prue.

"The equivalent of much coal. Patergrey wrote an article—by request, mind you—for a magazine, and they have sent him a check for a hundred dollars," cried Rob. "I guess there are people outside of Fayre with brains enough to appreciate our father!"

"Oh, how beautiful!" cried Oswyth, while Prue caught her breath in delight. Then, as Mrs. Grey's voice reached them in a happy laugh, the three made a stampede to join her outside.

"Did you ever know anything so splendumphant?" cried Rob, once more catching her mother around the waist in one of her mad onslaughts.

"I'm so glad, Mardy! You've looked so troubled," said Oswyth, kissing her mother with a tenderness so maternal that it almost seemed as though their relation was reversed.

Prue beamed on them all impartially. "I think it is quite awful that money can make people so happy and unhappy," she remarked.

"That is an opinion held by all philosophers—all *other* philosophers, Prudence," observed her father.

"Let's make a tucked-in for dinner," said Rob. "It's the only way I can express my joy."

A "tucked-in" was Rob's name for a fruit-pudding, into which one tucked whatever fruit might chance to be in season at its making.

"Blueberry!" cried Prue, enthusiastically. "I'll go back to the store and get them—they had beauties this morning when I went for the mail."

"What a lovely day!" said Wythie, but, though she gazed afar over the tree-tops as she spoke, they knew that she did not refer to the weather, nor the fleckless sky above them.

"I feel as though an inexpressible weight had been lifted from my shoulders; I'm very happy, dear," said Mrs. Grey. But though she laid her hand on her husband's arm as she spoke, and

looked at him, only Rob, who loved him so protectingly, understood that over and above the relief of having the means to provide necessities for her family, her mother rejoiced that her husband, for whose sake her sensitive pride was always up in arms, had aroused himself to give them to her.

Dinner was scarcely over when Prue, looking out of the window, called to her sisters: "Here comes Battalion B." This was Rob's final christening of the three Rutherfords, who rarely appeared separately. The friendship between them and the girls had progressed sufficiently for the Greys not to mind being caught by "Battalion B" in their uniforms, and Rob leaned out of the window now to hail them with wild wavings of a dish-towel.

"How are you, Grey ladies?" cried Basil, as they entered. "We have come to demand of you an afternoon in the orchard, beneath whose spreading appletrees the village chestnut wishes to paint Prue's portrait."

"My portrait?" cried Prue, starting up in a rapture.

"Wno, may I ask, is the village chestnut?" inquired Wythie.

"Bartlemy Rutherford, whose talents as an

artist are great, though unrecognized," said Bruce.

"Does Bartlemy paint?" cried Wythie, surprised.

"And powders and tints his eyebrows," whispered Bruce behind his hand, in a stage aside. "But he doesn't want it known."

"Can you really paint, Bart? And will you do my portrait?" asked Prue, much impressed, for she had caught a sufficient glimpse of an easel and paint-box outside to convince her there was something behind Basil's opening statement besides a jest.

"Oh, well, I can paint some—I always liked to. I'd like to try to do you, if you wouldn't mind, down in the orchard, under the trees, you know," stammered Bartlemy, getting embarrassed.

"He doesn't do so badly," added Basil. "You'd be surprised. We've got canvases at home representing our tutor's brow, Bruce's mouth, my nose, quite marvellously. Of course, there are other features in each of these portraits, but those are the ones faithfully limned, so we always politely allude to the portraits by their successful points. In private we call Bartlemy Fra Bartolomeo. You observe its suitability;

he is already Bartlemy; he is a brother—twice a brother—so the *fra* part is o. k., and he is a painter. We think it kind and complimentary to call him Fra Bartolomeo."

"Oh, let up on your nonsense, Bas," growled Bartlemy, even his long-suffering patience beginning to give way. "Will you let me try a portrait of you, or won't you, Prue?"

"I'd be perfectly delighted," cried Prue. "Only you must wait for me to put on a white dress and let my hair down."

"And wash your face, little Goldilocks," added Rob. "However beautiful blueberry juice may be as a temporary decoration, I shouldn't like it perpetuated in a portrait."

Prue ran away, not deigning to notice this piece of advice, and came back as quickly as was consistent with the attainment of perfect beauty, looking really lovely in her snowy muslin gown, and her big brown eyes alight under her masses of sunny hair.

"I'm going to take my darning," announced Wythie.

"Oh, dear," sighed Rob. "If only you good people didn't shame others into being good, too! I suppose I ought to take some work—I'll shell the peas!" This was a heroic resolve, for Aunt

Azraella, in an unwonted fit of generosity, had sent the Greys half a bushel of peas from her abundance, to be canned for winter use, and the shelling them was a formidable undertaking.

Rob pulled out the big basket of peas, and Basil and Bruce, each seizing a handle, bore it forth. Rob followed with her big pan; Prue, in the glory of her spotless raiment and the importance of sitting for her portrait, could not be expected to carry more than her own weight, so Rob had to hang the basket intended for pods across her shoulders, and walked immediately behind Basil and Bruce, beating wildly on her pan.

Prue, holding up her skirts daintily, walked beside Bartlemy, with his artist's paraphernalia, as Oswyth, with her pretty sweet-grass work-basket, brought up the rear, as calm and fair as always.

Down to the orchard they went, and to Bartlemy, as the one it concerned, was left the selection of place. Finally he placed Prue to his satisfaction—and greatly to her own—in the fork of a picturesquely shaped old appletree, and fell back to regard her in approved artist fashion, head on one side, and with one eye closed.

Then he set up his easel, and the rest disposed

of themselves on the grass, regardless of creatures that crawled.

Basil and Bruce—as perhaps she had expected—volunteered to help Rob in her task, and sitting opposite each other, placed the empty basket between their knees, while Rob sat beside them, where she could reach supplies, with the bright pan in her lap, into which the peas were soon hailing under the swift work of thirty fingers.

Oswyth began to darn, sitting a little apart, but almost forgetting her work in the interest of watching Bartlemy sketch in the outline of the appletree and Prue's slender figure, with swift, sure strokes. Whatever Bartlemy might prove as a colorist, he unmistakably could draw.

"When the little busy B's
Turn their minds to shelling peas,"

began Rob in a cheerful sing-song, but got no further, for Bruce interrupted her, carrying on her stanza,

"'Neath the leadership of Rob,
What's a half-bushel job?"

he sang.

"You are such nice boys," cried Rob, approvingly. "Just as big geese as we are ourselves."

"Bigger, physically, but mentally we yield to you," said Basil, with a bow.

"Do you expect to be a painter, Bart?" asked Wythie. The sketch he was making was really full of talent.

"I'd like to be; they say I can't tell what I want till I finish college, but I think I know," said Bartlemy. "I want to go off to Europe and live in galleries for a few years, and then try my own hand."

"I mean to teach school," said pretty Prue, looking as picturesquely unlike such a career as was possible. "I'm the only one that is getting a regular school training; Wythie and Rob did lessons at home, but I'm to be properly educated. So I shall teach. Unless I sing," she added, as an after-thought.

"Bruce has been a doctor, according to his own verdict, ever since he could speak," said Basil.

"And Basil doesn't care what he does, provided it puts a pen between his fingers, and encloses him in four walls lined with books," added Bruce.

"I think I shall be a motorman," said Rob, gravely. "I get so deadly tired sometimes of hearing no clang or rattle! There is a monotony about my youth that will drive me to trolleys, or a Ferris wheel when I grow up. I'd like to see things hum."

Now a seventh member of the party had been adding himself to it, unseen of the others, and in easy approaches. This was a grey goat belonging to the Greys for some years, whose intimacy with the family was fully established, and whose manners were of the pleasantest. But whether he regarded Bartlemy's easel as a personal affront, or whether he resented his daring to paint the pretty youngest girl, to whom the goat belonged in a particular manner, no one was ever sufficiently in his confidence to say, but just as Rob announced her desire to see things hum, they hummed, for the grey goat, kicking up his heels, charged head down, full at artist and easel.

Neither was prepared. Bartlemy was stooping, brush in teeth, to look for a palette-knife, and two of the easel's three legs rested on tufts of grass. As the goat charged Bartlemy went head over heels down a slope below him; the canvas flew up and lighted full on Oswyth's smooth head; the easel fell with a clatter, and paints danced broadcast over the grass. Prue screamed, and so did Oswyth, not recognizing the assailant in the first confusion. Basil and Bruce fell prone on their backs, one in each direction, like Max and Maurice in the old pictures,

perfectly convulsed with laughter, while Rob, after the pause of a startled instant, fell on her face and nearly went into hysterics.

The goat, seeing that he was, after all, in the midst of friends, and seeming to fear that he might have estranged them, looked around on the company with a vacuous and conciliatory expression, while Bartlemy, sitting erect, and pulling his collar up and his belt down, returned the goat's gaze with a horrible scowl that sent his brothers and the girls off into fresh spasms of laughter.

"What is he?" demanded Bartlemy, and added, shaking his fist at the goat: "You old sign of the zodiac, I wasn't interfering with you, was I?"

"That's our—our nice—gentle—oh, dear me! —our nice, gentle, old Ben Bolt," gasped Rob, sitting up and wiping her eyes.

"Gentle!" ejaculated Bartlemy.

"He's our little pet," said Rob. "Come here, Ben, dear. Why did you go for to do it? Bowling over a harmless boy who was painting of your missus!"

Ben Bolt meekly obeyed, and took the chance to seize a mouthful of peas, as he gazed with his light-barred eyes at the wreck he had made.

"Can you hold him, Rob? Is he likely to go off again?" asked Bartlemy.

"Never," said Rob, confidently. "I think he may not like art."

"Probably suspects camel-hair brushes of being made of goat-hair," suggested Basil, pulling Bruce into shape, who was quite weak from laughing. "Where did you get the little angel, Rob?"

"Why, when Prue was only eight years old she found some boys abusing a little grey kid—probably she felt for him because she was a little Grey kid herself. At any rate, she purchased him for all her wealth—a quarter—and brought him home. He's been a good goat, and used to drag Prue in her wagon until she outgrew it. We named him Ben Bolt because he bolted everything in sight, but though I used to sing to him, inquiring if he didn't 'remember sweet Alice, Ben Bolt,' it never affected him visibly."

"Painting is over for to-day," announced Bartlemy. "My easel has a fractured limb, and my palette is broken."

"Oh, can't you go on?" cried Prue, so mournfully that they all laughed.

"Not to-day. We'll try again—sans Ben Bolt—soon," said Bartlemy.

"It's such a pity; my dress is so clean," sighed Prue.

"She finds it a world of stains and pains," observed Rob. "Never mind, Prue; you aren't losing your hair yet."

"Come on, kid; help with these peas, since you can't paint," said Basil.

"Meaning me, or the goat?" asked Bartlemy, accepting the invitation.

"Give Ben Bolt the pods, and let's sing to him; then he'll be ashamed of himself," said Rob, who dearly loved the sextettes the Greys and Battalion B carolled.

"Or ashamed of us," suggested Bruce, but obediently lifted up his voice in song.

The peas were done much too soon, with so many shelling. Long before the young people were tired the last pod had yielded its five plump fellows to the green-filled pan, under the pressure of Wythie's thumb. Shouldering their burdens the six returned to the house.

"It has been a dear day," said Wythie, as she and Rob stood for a moment on the steps before closing the little grey house for the night.

"Beautiful!" assented Rob, promptly. "In spite of our trials and drawbacks we do have some blithe days in the grey house."

CHAPTER SIX

ITS HARD DAYS

"Julius has abdicated, and Augustus reigns in his stead," remarked Prue, as she tore off the leaf of her calendar, which marked the first day of the eighth month. Prue was fond of making what she considered neatly erudite allusions.

Matters had not been going well in the little grey house. Mrs. Grey found herself looking forward to the winter with dread, a dread she tried to stifle, for it was contrary to this brave woman's temperament and principles to look apprehensively toward the future.

Mr. Grey was working feverishly on his bricquette machine, more than ever absorbed in it; it seemed to his anxious wife as if he were putting into it his own vitality, that it was consuming something far more precious than its inventor had ever dreamed would feed it. But, since she could not prevent the harm—if harm

were being done—Mrs. Grey strove to drive the thought of it from her, and bear her immediate burden, which was not too light.

It was a humid, sultry day, and many trying household tasks loomed ahead threateningly on the morning when Prue made her classic allusion as she tore off her calendar-leaf. Oswyth looked pale and tired. She was an expert little needlewoman and had been sewing hard through the heat to make old as good as new—which it never was and never will be—for Prue's return to school. Prue was very particular as to her raiment; poor child, it was hard to be the prettiest girl, and at the same time the poorest one, in the school. Wythie sympathetically thought and wrought to make her gowns as pretty and becoming as possible to offset their many reappearances, and the hardship of wearing the clothes one's elders had outgrown. Even Rob, though she scoffed at Prue's little vanities, in her heart was sorry for the child who alone of the three was forced out among her contemporaries, and could not hide her deficiencies within the friendly walls of the little grey house.

Mrs. Grey had been waiting an opportunity to cover the two big arm-chairs in the parlor. There was nothing that this energetic woman

could not do with her hands, and Rob said: "Give Mardy a package of dyes, a paper of tacks, and a hammer, and you may look for anything, from a wedding-gown to a coach-and-four."

A certain faded poplin gown, in many pieces, and an old silk with brocaded stripes had long haunted Mrs. Grey as a hopeful source of new chair-covers. All the previous afternoon she had spent dipping the poplin into a big iron pot bubbling over the fire and bringing it up on the end of her "witch stick," as the girls called it, dripping and dark, to be hung out to dry.

Here appeared Mrs. Grey's generalship, for though the poplin had turned out a fine, uniform green, the pieces were much too narrow for upholstery. So she had cut out the brocade stripes from the old silk; the ancient sewing-machine, which made such a dreadful clatter and was one of the Greys' grievances, yet which was still capable of good service, rattled and hummed under Mrs. Grey's feet, as she stitched the brocade bands at regular intervals on the dyed poplin, covering its many joinings. And behold, the result was a fine upholsterer's tapestry of wool, with a silken stripe, and not a piecing to be seen!

"There's glory for you!" cried Rob. "Any-

one would believe that we paid any amount a yard for that beautiful stuff."

"Put up your sewing, Wythie, and you and Rob stretch it and hold it in place for me while I tack," said Mrs. Grey. "I flatter myself these chairs are going to radiate splendor over the entire room."

"Come, then, Mardy; we'll help it radiate," said Rob. "Mercy, how dreadful it is to-day—worse than hot—so sticky and horrid! Cat days are nicer than dog days, aren't they, Kiku-san? Now look at that catlet!" she added. Kiku-san had sprung from the table to the top of the door, on the narrow space of which he sat, head on one side, in his usual bird-like attitude, his white fur all streaks of dust. He was quite unable to get down as he had got up, and Rob said with a sigh: "Oh, dear; this means going to fetch a kitchen-chair to take him down! I wonder how many times a day we do this? And a grasshopper's a burden to-day, not to mention a heavy wooden chair. I never saw such a mischievous cat! And only look at him! Regular stained-glass expression; doesn't look as if he ever thought of anything but Watts's hymns! He does this just to keep us trotting, the demure villain!" And Rob shook a forefinger at Kiku, who only tipped

his head a little more to one side, and puckered his mouth a little tighter, knowing perfectly that he was about to be rescued.

Rob came back dragging the chair disconsolately on its rear legs, and placing it under the doorway, mounted it, seized Kiku-san by his forepaws, and pulled him down, giving him an admonitory and chastising pat as she set him free.

"You've got to take the chair back, Prue; I'm going to help Mardy, and I can't do all the fetching and carrying," said Rob, as she descended.

"Indeed, I won't," said Prue, promptly. "You feel as much like it as I do."

Rob tossed her head and went toward the parlor without another word, and Prue departed upstairs, leaving the object of dissension where it stood. Wythie patiently picked it up and bore it away, and followed Rob to the parlor, where she and her mother were already fitting the beautiful new covering on the chair.

"It's splendid, Mardy; what a genius you are!" cried Wythie, dropping on her knees at her side of the chair. For a while they pulled and cut, and Mrs. Grey tacked in silence, except for the necessary directions. No one felt quite

cheerful, nor had superfluous energy to spend in speech.

Just as one chair was nearly finished a shadow fell across its arm, and Mrs. Grey and the girls looked up to see Aunt Azraella, who had entered unheard, watching them with her sternest look of disapproval. "Ah, good-morning, Azraella," said Mrs. Grey, noting this and trying to speak brightly enough to avert its expression. "We are trying to forget the heat in the interest of hard labor."

"So I see. Aren't you forgetting something besides the heat, Mary?" said this inflexible lady.

"Why, no; are we?" asked Mrs. Grey, surprised into a hasty mental inventory of possible duties unfulfilled or engagements broken.

"Aren't you forgetting that there are more necessary things than chair-covers?" demanded Aunt Azraella. "Aren't you forgetting the state of your finances, and that you can't afford the least extravagance? How much did you pay a yard for that material?"

Rob, foreseeing this question, had been engaged in a hasty mental estimate of the original cost of the poplin and the silk. "Dollar and a quarter for the woollen stuff—one seventy-five,

surely, for the brocade, when Mardy married, just—it cost precisely three dollars a yard, Aunt Azraella," she said aloud, before her mother could reply.

Mrs. Winslow held up her hands in horror, and Mrs. Grey said, reproachfully: "Rob, how can you?"

"I've no doubt the child speaks the truth," said Aunt Azraella, quickly.

"Thanks, aunt; I do try to," said Rob. "Mardy, you know it must have cost at least three dollars—both of it."

"And you don't think that disgraceful, as you are situated?" began Mrs. Winslow, but her sister-in-law interrupted her. "Azraella," she cried—it was indicative of Aunt Azraella's character that on the hottest day, and under the stress of physical weariness, no one ever thought of abbreviating her name—"Azraella, aren't you used to Rob's pranks yet? This is my old grey poplin, dyed, and run together with the stripes of a handsome brocade I had when I was married. This scamp of a girl is giving you the original cost of both materials; I am very glad it looks well enough to deceive even your keen eyes."

But Aunt Azraella was not to be diverted from expressing the wrath which had been gath-

ering on her brow since Mrs. Grey had begun explaining.

"Roberta is distinctly a trial," she said, severely. "An unmannerly, impertinent girl. She may consider it funny to give me such a misleading answer, but I consider it most disrespectful."

"I was only trying to be cheerful, aunt," said Rob, her face crimson, and struggling not only to speak quietly, but to speak at all. "I didn't intend to deceive you, but only to—well, to have a little fun before you found out the truth."

"I know perfectly that you always object to my interest in your affairs, but I consider your good more important than your likings. I shall always tell all of you—from your indolent father and your indulgent mother down—precisely what I think. It is my duty to be perfectly candid and truthful," said Mrs. Winslow with the air of a martyr.

"Perfect candor is rather dangerous, Azraella," said Mrs. Grey, and Rob saw that she was having as much difficulty in speaking calmly as her inflammable self. "One should wait until it is sought, and then not indulge in its full expression, especially when one's opinions are offensive —such as an allusion to the head of a house as in-

dolent, for instance. Mr. Grey has been working so hard of late that I am anxious about him. And you see that you judged rashly in pronouncing us extravagant. We were rather priding ourselves on our clever thrift. It is such a very humid, trying day, that it is not favorable to too great zeal for others."

When her gentle sister-in-law spoke with a certain calm deliberation, and a slight lowering of lids and lifting of eyebrows, Mrs. Winslow was apt to read it as a danger-signal and retreat. At heart she stood in awe of her better-bred, better-born sister-in-law, and dared not press her too far. Aunt Azraella had a habit of seeking the little grey house as a lecture-field when affairs in her larger house went wrong.

"Well, Mary," she now began more mildly, "you know who it was that asked if he were his brother's keeper. I think it is our duty to exert ourselves for our neighbors, especially for our misguided kindred, and never to shrink from the utterance of a truth, however unwelcome. But you hold yourself entirely aloof from the affairs of others, and I suppose we shall never see the question alike. I want to tell you about Elvira —she is such a trial! And in this case you must advise me."

"Very well," said Mrs. Grey, with a sigh, seeing that Rob's tears of nervous wrath were falling, as she pretended to busy herself with the lining under the chair-seat, and resigning herself to listen for the unnumbered time to a recital of the wrong-doings of faithful Elvira, Mrs. Winslow's long-suffering "help," in the old-fashioned sense. It would all end as it always did; Elvira only failed in the small ways incident to humanity, and Aunt Azraella was wholly dependent upon her.

For a long time Mrs. Winslow recounted her woes, while Mrs. Grey and Wythie and Rob pulled and tacked. How Elvira had insisted on placing the glasses on the second shelf of the cupboard when Mrs. Winslow had always kept them on the third; how she had resolutely clung to a cheesecloth duster where her mistress preferred silk, and a cloth-covered broom for cornices, where Mrs. Winslow, and her mother before her, had used a feather-duster, etc., etc., through the whole long list of pettiness which meant only that the August day was sultry and Aunt Azraella out of sorts.

At last she paused, and Mrs. Grey saw that she had talked herself into a better frame of mind, her troubles remedied in their recital. "I

wonder what would become of poor Elvira if Mrs. Winslow hadn't the little grey house as a safety-valve?" thought Mrs. Grey, but what she said aloud was what she always said under these circumstances: "After all, Elvira is a good, devoted creature, Azraella."

"Yes; I suppose I can't do better in Fayre than to keep her," said Aunt Azraella, responding in the set form to this liturgical remark. "I must go back, or she will have a chicken broiled for my supper. I told her I didn't want it, but she always does something of that sort when I have been annoyed. Send Prue up for some blackberries to-morrow, Mary. I have enough to let you have some for jam—possibly for cordial, too."

"Thank you; good-by, Azraella," said Mrs. Grey, and Rob arose to say good-by a trifle grimly, as Wythie escorted their relative to the door.

"Oh, dear," said Wythie, coming back and sitting flat on the floor beside the chair, now nearly done, in an attitude eloquent of exhaustion, if not despair. "I really think, Mardy, if we could emigrate, we ought to; it's enough to turn a saint into a tiger to have such visits so often."

"They used to turn saints into tigers in the Colosseum very frequently in the early Christian era," said Rob, whose spirits always rose a few points when Wythie's went down.

"I think I'll leave the gimp till another day," said Mrs. Grey, straightening herself with difficulty, and drawing a long breath as she put her hand to her aching back. "As to emigrating, Wythie, you will have to emigrate to heaven to escape annoyances. We have often agreed, you know, that Aunt Azraella is not wholly a trial; we shall enjoy her blackberries, for instance. I wish Rob could remember that she is utterly devoid of a sense of humor, and that people of that unfortunate sort usually resent nonsense as a personal affront. Mercy! What's that?"

A crash of crockery and a scream echoed through the quiet house, bringing its master to his door to inquire what was wrong, and sending Rob upstairs in a rush, ejaculating but the one word: "Prue!"

Mrs. Grey and Wythie followed as fast as they could, and a mournful sight met their eyes. In the middle of Wythie and Rob's room stood Prue, dripping, and on the floor, in an absolutely unmendable wreck, lay the water-pitcher, with

an ugly scar on the front of the wash-stand to mark the course of its fall, while the matting was soaked in water.

"Quick! It will go through to the dining-room ceiling," cried Rob, snatching a towel and dropping on her knees to mop as though her life depended upon it, an example Wythie instantly followed.

"What were you doing, Prudence?" asked her mother.

Prue's tears were fast adding themselves to the general dampness. "Kiku was so black I thought I'd wash him," she sighed. "He struggled, and I really don't know what happened, but I knocked the pitcher off with my elbow, and—well, you see!"

"Rather!" said Rob, from her humble attitude. "Feel, too. My dress is getting as wet as the towel. There's one comfort: between them the dining-room ceiling will be safe; but oh, I did love that toilet-set!"

"And so did I," said Mrs. Grey, sadly, as she picked up one of the largest fragments and regarded it mournfully. "I bought it when I was married. I remember how proud I was of my new dignity when I made the purchase. Ah, well, Prue; accidents must befall; but I can't

help wishing that you had left Kiku to his dusty little self."

"So do I, Mardy," said Prue.

"And now Wythie and I have no pitcher," observed Rob, too tired and warm to find forgiveness easy.

"You needn't complain if Mardy doesn't," said Prue, sharply.

"Go change your dress, Prue; no one has complained nor blamed you," said her mother.

Prue retreated with bad grace, but in a moment called pleasantly from her room: "Here comes Mr. Flinders, Mardy. He looks glummer than usual."

"Go down, one of you girls; I'm really too tired to encounter him now," said Mrs. Grey, wearily. She had had many sore experiences of the farmer who carried on their garden on shares, and who was always ready to cut down their share to the minimum.

Rob arose with a sigh. There was a tacit understanding that in any matter of business it should be she, and not Wythie, who came to the front.

"Something has failed," she said, laconically, speaking from past experience and the pessimism of a humid, tiresome day.

"Good day, Roberta," said Mr. Flinders, when Rob appeared at the door. "I'm afraid I've got to say what you won't want to hear."

"Very likely, Mr. Flinders," said Rob, drearily. "I am so tired to-night there are few things I should want to hear."

"Well, the pertaters is doing bad—your pertaters," said Mr. Flinders. "I thought mebbe you'd want to know in time to engage some."

"Are they spoiled?" asked Roberta, aghast, for the failure of that particular crop meant serious misfortune for the winter.

"Well, what with dry-rot and bugs, I guess you're not goin' to git many," said Mr. Flinders. "I thought mebbe you'd want to know," he ended, breaking down under the sternness of Roberta's dark eyes.

"Did the bugs and dry-rot attack only our potatoes?" she demanded.

"It's kinder diffused, so to say," admitted the farmer, "but I guess it's fair to subtract the loss from yours mostly, because I've got to be made good for my trouble."

This was Farmer Flinders's invariable response, and Rob flashed fire. "Mr. Flinders," she said, "you can't share only profits—you've got to share losses, too. We're getting tired of it.

We'll send for someone to look over the garden, and decide the question of the proportion of loss on the spoiled crop, and we will settle exactly on the basis of one-third loss for us and two-thirds for you, just as we share profits."

"I wasn't aware, Roberta, you was runnin' the place. If you're managin', I'd like to be notified," said Farmer Flinders, rigid with offence.

"I'm the business one of the family," said poor Rob, with sudden inspiration, "and it will be as I say. I represent the Greys. We shall not accept less than our third of the good vegetables, and that notification will be all you need, Mr. Flinders."

She had never encountered the old fellow before, and she felt that he recognized and objected to the fact that here was youthful fire and determination to deal with, unlike her mother's gentleness or her father's easy methods.

"I'll see your father later," said the farmer, turning away ill at ease. "Good-day, Roberta."

"Good-day," said Rob, briefly, and retraced her steps heavily upstairs. She found Wythie lying across the foot of their bed, and threw herself on her face beside her.

"What luck?" asked Oswyth, sleepily.

Rob punched and poked a pillow into shape, and looked morosely out of the window at the thunder-clouds piling up in the west, the result of the hot, sultry day.

"Oh, I barked at him. I think I shall have to see him in future; I believe I have more effect than mild Mardy and patient Patergrey," Rob said. "But, oh, I'm tired—tired of being vivacious and snappy and go-ahead. I'm tired, dead tired, of fighting, Oswyth. I'd like to lie down and be taken care of, like a little ewe lamb. There are two Robs in me; one is sneakingly cowardly, and wants only to curl up in a hole and hide; and the other says: 'S't, boy! sic 'em, Rob!' And I'm up and at it again—at fate, and hard times, and Aunt Azraella, and house-work, and Mr. Flinders, and all those horrors. And then the tired, meek Rob tears around obediently, and no one dreams it's all like thumb-screws and rack to her. I'm tired of my rôle of snapping-turtle, Wythie."

"Poor Rob!" said Oswyth, gently running her fingers in and out of Rob's beautiful, gleaming rings of hair, and stroking the mobile face, now twisting hard in its effort to laugh when the tears were very near falling.

"Don't mind me," said Rob, succeeding in

forcing a feeble laugh. "I'm tired, and it's been a fearfully humid, trying, tiresome, crooked day. Besides, we're going to have a thunder-storm, and electricity always makes me sick. Don't mind me."

CHAPTER SEVEN

ITS MENACE

Miss Charlotte Grey was spending the day with her cousins. Two of August's weeks had slipped away, and the air was fresh and pleasant. It seemed to the Grey girls as if it were always refreshing weather when "Cousin Peace" came.

All unpleasant tasks were laid aside; the blinds in the cosey upstairs sitting-room were closed, with the slats turned to admit the breeze and the droning sound of the bees humming in the old garden. This old garden was left to its own sweet will, and by August it was a thoroughly sweet will; its varied-shaped beds were lush with a profusion of honey-laden blossoms, whose fragrance permeated everywhere.

Every taint of annoyance seemed banished from the little grey house when Cousin Peace came to spend the day. Mrs. Grey was hemming delicately cool linen to be divided into family collars, and feather-stitched. Wythie was putting new sleeves into Prue's cherished white

gown, Roberta was making fresh, clean-looking, green-and-white gingham into an apron, and Prue was shelling peas, the juicy sweetness of their pods adding to the pleasant summer smells around them. Miss Charlotte was knitting—she was usually knitting—little fleecy white things to wrap babies in, and bright mittens for little hands.

"I have a new magazine here which Mrs. Silsby sent down yesterday by Frances, Charlotte," said Mrs. Grey, "but I thought we would keep it for those lazy hours after dinner, then one of the girls must read to us."

"That sounds attractive," said Cousin Peace. "Will Sylvester join us?"

"Oh, Charlotte, no," cried Mrs. Grey. "Sylvester is absolutely swallowed up in his invention; he has no eyes, nor ears, nor thoughts to spare from it. Rob is the only one who sees him lately, and that is because she helps him. He expects to finish the machine in a few months, but in the meantime he is so concentrated on it, and seems so excited that I can only long for its completion, and his relief from this strain, whatever the result of the work may be."

"I thought the last time I saw him that he was not looking well," said Miss Charlotte.

The girls were accustomed to her speaking as though she saw the people and things around her; to her delicately keen perceptions there was really little difference between blindness and sight.

"I am anxious," said Mrs. Grey. "Dear Charlotte, only suppose he were to be really ill!"

"We won't suppose it," said Cousin Peace, cheerily.

Mrs. Grey shook her head. "Come to the commissary department, Adjutant Wythie," she said, with a pathetic smile. "We mustn't forget that Cousin Peace, as well as more turbulent people, must be fed." Wythie followed her mother, and Prue, hastily emptying her last pods, ran after them, the peas dancing up to the edge of the pan as she ran.

"Cousin Peace, I'm glad to get you to myself for a few minutes; you know everything, you have ideas in your finger-tips," said Rob, laying her bright head on Miss Charlotte's knee. "What shall I do to earn money? I'm only sixteen, and untrained. I've read—thank goodness, Patergrey and Mardy took care to give me the best books and a liking for them, and I really do know lots of things other girls don't know, but they know lots of things I don't—school-

book things, you see. Now, what is there that sort of a young person could do to make her fortune and her family's?"

Miss Charlotte shook her head. "You ought to have special training in something, and, above all, you ought to be older before you begin, Rob dear," she said. "Is there any new reason for haste, any fresh pressure?"

"There may be. Mardy heard that some of her investments might pay less this winter, and you know how she has to struggle at best to keep us warmed and clad and fed," said Rob. "I must help her. If I don't find a way some day to make up to that brave, dear, blessed soul for all her hard times, then I'm not the girl I hope I am. It makes me just wild to be useless! I'll get luxury for her old age if I have to go about with a hand-organ and a monkey! And if I can't grind the organ, I'll be the monkey," added Rob, turning her face up to laugh in Miss Charlotte's face, with one of her sudden flashes of fun.

Miss Charlotte bent to kiss Rob, her favorite —if she had one—among the three young cousins of whom she was very fond.

"You might not get her positive luxury by that desperate measure, dearie," she said. "But

you are far from useless. I can no more imagine the little grey house without you than without its foundations. Don't be anxious nor impatient, Robin; you'll find your place when the time comes, and, in the meantime, you don't realize what a sunny bit of courage you are, nor how these Grey people lean on you. I have a strong foreboding, Roberta, that you are going to have your young hands filled very soon, and your work cut out for you—it may be a work that will demand all your strength."

Roberta sat erect, startled. Wythie and she had always felt that Cousin Peace had a gift of foreknowledge almost like second sight; she was so keenly alive to her atmosphere that she felt its changes to a degree that had to blunter folk the effect of prophecy. Something kept Rob now from asking her cousin's meaning. She straightened her young shoulders, and said, instead: "I hope when the time comes I shall not fail them."

And Miss Charlotte, understanding that by "them" she meant her family, said, with entire conviction: "I am certain, my dear, that you never will."

After dinner "Battalion B" came whistling down the road, and stepped, one after the other, over the gate of the little grey house. They

had come to get the girls to go rowing with them, but finding Miss Charlotte there they gave up the plan very willingly, for the tall Rutherford boys had long since succumbed to the charm of the sweet blind woman.

"Prue, run up and get the magazine I left in the sitting-room," said Mrs. Grey.

"We'll make Basil and Bruce read aloud," cried Rob. "They're too big to be idle, and far too big to be generally useful."

Prue, obediently, left the room. As she reached the hall she heard a groan from her father's room, and heard him gasp: "Mary, Rob —oh, come!"

She rushed back to the dining-room, where Cousin Peace sat serenely in the breezy window, while Wythie and Rob put away the dinner dishes, and the Rutherfords were tormenting them. How beautiful it looked, how peaceful, to the frightened girl standing speechless in the doorway, with that hoarse moan of pain echoing in her ears, unheard by the others! Wythie looked up and saw Prue's face. The saucer she held fell to the floor in fragments. "Prue— what?" she gasped.

Everyone sprang up, and Mrs. Grey seized Prue's arm, in mute appeal.

"Papa's sick or hurt; he's groaning and trying to call," Prue managed to say.

Miss Charlotte, Wythie, Rob, and the boys pushed Prue aside, starting for the room across the hall, but Mrs. Grey's love outstripped them. She it was who first reached her husband's side, and knelt in terror beside his arm-chair, where he half sat, half lay, his face ashen, his breath short. His right hand pressed his chest, the left arm hung at his side, the pulse in the wrist hardly perceptible to his wife's fingers.

"What is it, dear? Can you tell me?" asked Mrs. Grey. Wythie and Miss Charlotte were bathing his temples, while Rob, on her knees at the other side of his chair, had loosened his collar.

For answer Mr. Grey pressed his hand closer to his breast, moving it slightly, but his lips barely moved.

"Bartlemy, run, run for the doctor!" cried Mrs. Grey. "Stay, Basil and Bruce—I may need you."

"Is it death, Mardy?" whispered Rob, feeling the cold of her father's body through his clothing.

"I don't know, Rob," Mrs. Grey's white lips answered, with an effort; in her heart she thought it was.

"If there were only something to do!" moaned Oswyth, feeling her helplessness unbearable.

It seemed to them all that an eternity had passed since they had entered that room—in reality it was scarcely two minutes. Suddenly Mr. Grey's limbs relaxed, he moved, closed his eyes, and as his wife held to his lips the water Prue handed her, said: "The pain has gone; I can breathe."

"Here's the doctor," cried Prue, and a long sigh of relief went around the tense room. "He has driven over without a hat, and brought Bart with him."

Dr. Fairbairn entered, bringing with him the feeling that now all must be right, which always attended that great man. A great man he was, since he easily footed up his seventy-four inches of height, huge in proportion, and with a heart and brain big out of proportion even to his immense bulk. He was one of those men without worldly ambition, yet afire with zeal, who are sometimes found ennobling the profession in small communities. Past sixty, Dr. Fairbairn had seen Sylvester Grey born, and still regarded the girls as his babies. Now he entered the troubled group, kindly, sympathetic, businesslike, strong to comfort and to save.

"What are you up to, now, Sylvester man?" he said, walking straight to his patient with a brief nod for the others.

"I don't know, doctor; it's all over now, anyway; I'm sorry they bothered you," said Mr. Grey.

"Don't be foolish, boy," said Dr. Fairbairn. "How were you taken?"

"Fearful pain just over the heart, in the chest, and all down the left arm. Then I felt suffocating, and the agony got unbearable; I really thought I was dying." And Mr. Grey gave a little apologetic laugh.

"Yes. Been working hard, thinking hard?" asked the doctor.

"The machine is almost done, doc. I have to work hard, and it takes all my thought. You can't realize—it means comfort, luxury maybe, for Mary and the children," said Mr. Grey, speaking rapidly and pulling himself erect.

"I didn't ask you all that. I see: concentration, nervous excitement, close application," muttered Dr. Fairbairn. "Go over there and lie down and let me hear your heart through this thing." The doctor led Mr. Grey to his lounge, and placed his stethoscope to his chest.

In a few moments he wound the tubes to-

gether and pocketed it again. "Now, look here, Sylvester Grey, is there any use in my giving you orders, or are you going to do precisely as you please anyway?" he said.

"I'll mind you if I can, doctor, but you know my health is nothing in comparison to what I have in hand. After a few months I'll take as good care of myself as you like," said poor Mr. Grey.

"That shows the uselessness of injunctions," said the doctor. "But now is the time to take care, not later. Avoid over-exertion and excitement; work moderately, don't over-do, and work calmly, then you may stave off similar attacks."

"And if I don't do this?" suggested his patient.

"You are certain to suffer this way again," said Dr. Fairbairn.

"Is there danger?" asked Mr. Grey.

"There is grave danger; it is your duty to avoid it," said the doctor.

Mr. Grey turned his face to the wall. "It is my duty to finish the machine and provide for my family," he murmured. "My life would be well spent if it purchased them peace."

"There is little peace to be had in the loss of the one we love best, Sylvester," said Miss Char-

lotte, who alone had caught his words, seating herself on the couch and beginning to stroke the weary head of him who had been her favorite playmate.

Mrs. Grey and her daughters, who had stood silently, breathlessly, listening to this conversation, now followed the doctor to the door.

"Tell me, Dr. Fairbairn," said Mrs. Grey.

"Angina pectoris, Mary, my dear, if that sheds any light on your darkness," said the big man, smiling down upon her, and, as she shook her head, he added: "It is an affection of the heart often found where there is no organic disease. It is dangerous in repeated attacks, and is not infrequently quickly fatal." Dr. Fairbairn did not approve of professional deception unless it was necessary.

"And so Sylvester is in danger?" Mrs. Grey almost whispered.

"Yes, Mary; over-work, over-excitement increases his danger," replied the doctor. "But no one can tell more than that. We are all in danger; we know of his—that's the main difference. Try to make him go more slowly."

"Thank you, Dr. Fairbairn," said Mrs. Grey.

"Now, don't begin bearing a sorrow that has not come," said the doctor. "That was never

your way. I'll send you the remedies you must use another time. Be of good courage, Mary; but there's no need of telling you that, you plucky little heroine." And with a tight clasp of the hand Mrs. Grey mutely held out to him, and a pat on each girl's white cheek, the big doctor was gone.

Mrs. Grey closed the door behind him and held out her arms. Her three children sprang into them, and the mother held them close in a convulsive embrace.

"We'll take care of him, Mardy," whispered Rob, with something clutching her throat.

Mrs. Grey pushed open the dining-room door and drew the girls after her into the room where the Rutherford boys had retreated to await the verdict. Mrs. Grey sank into the chair nearest her and laid her head on her arms above the table with a girlish movement of abandonment. Basil, grave and kindly, bent over her and put his arm across her shoulder as if to ward off grief. Bruce stroked the fine brown hair of the bowed head with awkward gentleness, and Bartlemy hovered helplessly in the background, making no secret of the tears on his brown cheeks.

The girls knelt beside her, Prue's head in her mother's lap. "Don't, Mardy darling," said

Wythie at last; it seemed so horribly unnatural for their brave mother to break down.

"See, Bruce, what you must do if you become a doctor," said Mrs. Grey, raising her head and trying to speak cheerfully. "You will have to tell people alarming truths, and go away knowing you have left behind you stricken hearts, for which you have just changed the whole face of creation."

"I would rather remember the comfort I may be able to bring," said Bruce. "Is it so bad?"

"Unless Mr. Grey will give himself the care which we are sure he will not feel that he can afford to give, he is in mortal danger; he is almost certain to have more of these attacks—angina pectoris, it is—and they are—are likely— Oh, my dears, just be patient with me a few moments! I will be brave later, but I must be a coward for a few moments, please dears!" And once more the head bent under its burden upon the folded arms.

Miss Charlotte came into the room, calm and smiling, and went directly to Mrs. Grey. Taking her hand in one of hers, and running the fingers of her other hand through Prue's golden hair, she said, brightly: "Mary, dear, Sylvester is sleeping beautifully; he will waken refreshed.

I know precisely what the doctor told you; I have seen angina pectoris before, and I recognized it. But we are not going to be cast down—only very careful. Dearest children, you are so frightened, aren't you? Remember, you must cheer your mother. Wythie and Rob, go make us your very best coffee. And Prudy-girl, dry your eyes, and cut us bread very thin, and butter it. And perhaps 'Battalion B' won't mind helping the girls with the fire—I'm sure it's nearly out. Now, Mary," she added, as the young people disappeared, and Mrs. Grey rose and threw herself on her cousin's breast, "courage, dear! Only your old courage re-enforced. There is danger, but we are going to be confident of escape. Go bathe your dear face, and then come back for your coffee, and when Sylvester wakens he will find the cheery Mary Winslow, who has tided him over so many hard spots. I think I hear Kiku mewing; perhaps we shut him in the sitting-room. Will you see when you go up?"

"Charlotte, Charlotte," cried Mrs. Grey, holding the blind woman fast for a moment before she obeyed. "In all the world there never was another such a comforting, sustaining, heaven-sent creature as you are!"

Miss Charlotte listened to her cousin's footfall on the stairs with a tender smile of satisfaction; she well knew the value of homely tasks in a dark hour, and that their resumption made tragedy seem impossible.

But left to herself Cousin Peace's smile faded; she dropped wearily into the chair Mrs. Grey had vacated, and, leaning her head on her hand, allowed the tears to gather and drop into her lap. The hope that she must maintain in others it was hard for her to feel. Her cousin was so frail, his life so far removed from the lives and interests of other men that it was easy to imagine it ended. He was certain to continue to work with the same feverish, excited eagerness until his patent was completed, and the doctor had said——

"Here is the bread, Cousin Peace, and the coffee is nearly ready," said Prue, entering, much more cheerful than she had gone out.

Miss Charlotte started up, with her own bright smile. "And I, for one, am quite ready to drink it!" she cried.

Mrs. Grey came back, smiling also, Kiku on her shoulder. "He was shut up, Peaceful, dear," she said, "and complaining bitterly of being forgotten through dinner-time."

Rob brought in the steaming coffee-pot, followed by a procession of three tall boys, each carrying something, ending with Wythie bearing the cream.

Mr. Grey pushed open the door just wide enough to admit his head. "Do I smell coffee?" he cried. "And would you have defrauded me?"

"You are to have hot milk, Sylvester," said Miss Charlotte.

"Oh, how do you feel, Patergrey?" cried Rob, springing to his side.

"I'll have nothing of the sort; I'll have a cup of this fragrant brew," declared Mr. Grey. "I feel all right, Rob, my son, only a trifle lame. I am sure the doctor exaggerated the case, though I confess I wouldn't have thought anything an exaggeration of it while it lasted. This bread and butter tastes uncommonly good! Rob, my son, can I borrow you after this repast is over? I need your help on a special bit of work for an hour."

"Oh, come now, Mr. Grey!" protested Bruce Rutherford, involuntarily.

" 'Vester, I implore of you, not to-night!" cried his wife, in such distress that, as the girls added their voices to the chorus of frightened protest, Mr. Grey looked from one to the other,

and visibly weakened. But Miss Charlotte clinched matters.

"You have no moral right to disregard Dr. Fairbairn, and the warning you have had, Sylvester Grey," she cried. "Besides, you are to take me home, and I am going to keep you to tea. I want to see you quite alone, but Wythie and Rob shall come for you, and bring you home in triumph."

"Well, one man against so many of the earth's rulers," Mr. Grey began. "Boys, won't you stand by me?"

"No, sir; not if you want to work to-day," said Basil; while Bruce added: "I'm beginning to think they rule the earth because they're better fit to do so. No, sir; we're on their side."

"You're beginning to cater to their love of flattery, you young humbug," said Mr. Grey. "Well, if I must yield, I might as well yield gracefully."

And later Miss Charlotte bore him away, leaving more hope behind her in the little grey house than had seemed possible three hours earlier.

CHAPTER EIGHT

ITS MAKESHIFTS

As day followed day, with no return of the cause of their anxiety, the Greys began to breathe more freely. If Mrs. Grey felt less confident than the children, she hid her fears, and the girls rejoiced with the buoyancy of youth in their rescue from the great sorrow threatening them.

The autumnal equinox had passed, Prue had resumed school, and beautiful brooding days of golden sunshine, with their lengthening evenings, and the first touch of the cosey, shut-in feeling winter brings were resting over Fayre. Rob's brow did not match the brooding peace of nature. Over and over, with growing desperation, she said to herself: "I must earn money, I *must* earn money, but how?" Mr. Grey had thrown caution to the four winds—if he could have been said to have any to throw—and was working madly on his invention by day, and dreaming of it by night. Rob was in constant

requisition to help him; she shared her father's excitement, and began to believe, with renewed faith, that they were on the eve of entering the land flowing with milk and honey. But the eve was dark and long, pointing, of course, proverbially to the nearness of dawn, but hard to live through.

The disaster the Greys had feared had befallen them; there was a temporary reduction in their income—so slender at best—owing to something going wrong with a railroad, in the queer, and, to feminine minds, mysterious ways investments have of behaving. It would be righted again one day, but in the meantime the reduction took the practical form of cutting down the simple family rations, leaving nothing for anything beyond necessities, very literally construed, and putting the Greys on a basis that really was, as Prue said, discontentedly: "Poor folksy." And Wythie and Rob did need winter coats so sadly! Their old ones were so shabby that Rob said she "was colder with it on than without it, for its whitened seams and many worn spots gave her chills."

"I give you fair warning, Wythie, I'm going to commit a felony," said poor Rob, coming home from a walk and trying to laugh as she

tossed her hat on the old "nurse," as they called the shabby but comfortable couch which had cuddled them all as babies. "I feel a felony coming on, and it's as drawing as a felon."

"What form is it going to take, Rob?" asked Wythie.

"Stealing," said Prue, promptly. "I know I wanted to break in Roger's window to-day and take the chocolate éclairs he had put there—they looked perfect dreams, and were as fresh! Or else you want to fib," she added, thoughtfully. "No, though; you're not tempted as I am. It is simply awful when the girls ask you why you don't do this, or why you don't get that. What am I going to tell them?"

"The truth, that you can't afford it," said Rob, stoutly. "You might as well, for everybody in Fayre knows everybody else's affairs just a little better than they do themselves, so everybody knows we're poor—poor as pudding-stone rock. But there's one comfort; they all know, too, we're not every-day, pasture pudding-stone, but real old Plymouth Rockers, so mere money doesn't matter much—except to us. I don't suppose—since Mardy isn't here—there's any use in our pretending we don't mind the present pinching state of our finances."

"Our history lesson yesterday was on the way Alexander Hamilton made banks and money out of nothing but his country's debts, almost before it was a country; I wish I knew how he did it," observed Prue, pensively.

"You haven't told us what form you felt your felony would take, Rob," said Oswyth. "Where does your moral felon hurt you?"

"I feel twinges all over, my dear Anglo-Saxon messenger," said Rob, airily. "In my feet when I look at my shoes, in my fingers when I put on my old gloves, or, worse yet, mittens instead of gloves, such as most fair maidens wear, and in my stomach when I try to make it believe an egg, some creamed potatoes, and a rice-pudding are porterhouse steak. But it's reaching a climax on my back. I must have a winter coat, and so must—a muster must—you, my patient Wythie. To-day when I came past the rectory —St. Chad's rectory—the lady rectoress had hung out her three daughters' three new winter coats, fur-trimmed, O my sisters, and beautiful to behold! I am going to break and enter that house in the dark of the moon, and steal those coats."

"I hope if you're caught your punishment will

be banishment from Fayre, or I don't see what good your felony will do you—you can never wear the coats," laughed Wythie, and then she sighed. "It's hard, Robsy, but bear up, my boy! You believe this is our last hard winter."

Rob shrugged her shoulders. "Of course, but it's also the only one we're living through this year, and next year's dinners aren't sustaining—or, at least, you can't help weak moments if you live on them," she said. "Here comes our Aunt Azraella. She is stopping in the back yard to examine those two underskirts you sewed that lace on, Wythie. She is estimating its cost and disapproving of it at a high rate of pressure. I wish she would come around the front way, even if it is farther! What with the bleaching grass, the clothes-line, and the pantry window, the back way is dangerous to a critic born."

"Rob, you're a villain!" said Wythie, trying to pull her lips straight.

"You've time for a little laugh, Oswyth; she's delaying now at the blind I mended—neat job, Mrs. Winslow, ma'am, though I say it who shouldn't," remarked Rob. "As to being a villain, it's lucky I am, for unless a body's a saint like you—and you may have noticed I'm not—

Aunt Azraella might embitter one unless she were handled with a lightly humorous touch. Eyes right! Shoulder arms! She comes, the Greek—a freak?—she comes!"

Wythie and Prue looked flushed and shaken as their aunt entered, but Rob met her with the solemnity of a Holbein portrait, or as nearly as nature had allowed her rippling face to attain that standard.

"Good-morning, girls," said Mrs. Winslow. "I hardly have time to sit. Where's your mother? It doesn't matter; don't call her. I came on an errand."

"She's decided to waive the skirts; think how much nicer they'll look with that lace on them when they're waved," whispered Rob to Wythie, who choked as she gave her sister a remonstrant pinch.

"What I wanted was to borrow one of you girls to help me take down the old parlor curtains and put up my new ones," said Aunt Azraella. "Elvira has a bad knee, besides, she's busy, and I sent Aaron away on an errand. Oswyth, will you come?"

"I will go if you like, but Rob is better at such work," began Wythie.

"I have to help Patergrey," "I would rather

have you," said Rob and her aunt, speaking together.

"Auntie and I are mutually agreeable to your going, Wythikins," said Rob, smiling gaily into her aunt's face.

"I'll go," said Wythie, rising hastily; she was always nervously afraid of what might happen when Rob and their aunt collided. "Do you want me now?"

"Certainly; it gets dark too early to lose a minute," said Mrs. Winslow. "Get your hat and jacket and come right along."

Oswyth obeyed. It was a pretty walk up the hill to Mrs. Winslow's from the little grey house, but Oswyth did not enjoy it, for her aunt seized the opportunity to question her as to the Greys' domestic affairs, "because," she said, "Mary was so shut-mouthed," and to point out to the young girl how straight they were headed for destruction. The girls did not visit more frequently than duty demanded the hill-house which would have been so pleasant to them if their uncle had not left it too early for them to have known him. Oswyth entered it now with the chill it invariably gave her.

Every chair sat prim and straight in its own place against the wall; it made one shudder to

imagine what would have been the consequences if in the night they had taken to playing "Going to Jerusalem" with one another.

The light was carefully excluded, and, warm and soft although the air was out of doors, the house held a deadly chill in its atmosphere.

Books—proper compilations, selections, and poems—lay in austere firmness, each on its own spot on the bleak plateau of the marble-topped centre-table. A clock that had not made a new record of time in sixty-one thousand three hundred and twenty hours, pointed stoically to ten minutes to five from its position precisely in the middle of the parlor mantelpiece, flanked on either hand by a grimly resolute bronze warrior.

On the chair nearest the door lay the new curtains, dark blue, heavy material, folded neatly and piled on one another. The old ones, which had been pretty, green-corded silk, hung in their places at the six windows; even in the dim light they had abandoned all hope of concealing the fact that they were badly faded, and displayed their yellow streaks with hopeless candor.

At the sight of them an inspiration came to Wythie which nearly took her breath away. What was Aunt Azraella going to do with those old curtains?

Aunt Azraella laid aside her lingering sun-hat with a manner—for her—actually sprightly. "I'll get the steps, Oswyth, and you might be shaking the new curtains out of their folds and putting the pins in," she said. "You'll find new pins in that box on top of the pink china vase. Turn the curtains down to the depth of this card across the tops—all but two pairs. They have to be turned slanting, because they go at the end windows, where the floor has settled. But there! You can't do much while I'm getting the steps." And Aunt Azraella stepped away with a certain crisp decision which was her way of hurrying—Aunt Azraella never flustered.

Oswyth obediently shook out the curtains, and had laid the new upholsterer's pins on the table, separating them into detached rows, like so many brass grasshoppers, by the time her aunt returned with the step-ladder hung gracefully on one arm, the other slightly extended for balance. Before her walked Tobias, the tiger cat, so called because of his fishing proclivities, and who, so far from being spoiled like Kiku-san, was staid and serious, relegated to the kitchen and Elvira's society, and only suffered in the parlor under special conditions and surveillance, like the present.

"I'll take the old ones down, aunt; I can run up and down the steps more easily than you," said Wythie, taking the step-ladder from her aunt, and testing its iron brace as she set it before the first window. Mrs. Winslow began to stick pins into the obdurate new material, marking the amount to be turned down by keeping the card she had notched against it with her left thumb, holding the while a second brass grasshopper between her teeth, ready for use. Wythie unhooked the old pins from the rings and let the faded curtains droop, eagerly planning the while, and wondering if she could get her courage to the begging-point. "I don't think," said gentle Wythie to herself, "I do *not* think that we can be forbidden to covet our neighbor's goods when they are so very old and faded."

At last all the old curtains were down, and the new ones up in their place. Wythie had patiently climbed up and down the step-ladder, skilfully avoiding Tobias, who liked to sit on the second step from the top; had altered pins, and supported the heavy material while Aunt Azraella altered; her natural desire to please increased by her resolve to be bold and dare when all was done. And when it was done she had something of her reward, for Aunt Azraella

actually patted her on the shoulder, and said: "You have been very helpful, Oswyth. I was wise to insist on having you; Roberta would never have been so patient and thorough."

"I am glad if I have been useful," Wythie said, rather faintly.

"It seems a pity not to use those old curtains for something," said Aunt Azraella, whose mind was on the order of Mrs. John Gilpin's. "But they are too faded for any purpose, and too big to make it worth while sending them to New York to be dyed."

"I wonder if you would mind—Aunt Azraella, might I have them?" said Wythie, with desperate courage—it was nearly impossible for her to ask for anything.

"You, Oswyth! What on earth could you do with them? You can't mean to get your mother to dye them for curtains for your house? You don't need curtains," said Mrs. Winslow.

"I don't want them for curtains, Aunt Azraella; I want them for winter coats," said Wythie, more boldly, now that the first plunge was made. "Rob and I are too shabby to go out when there's a moon—not to mention sun. And Mardy could dye this material, and it would be warm and pretty. If you don't need them, aunt, they

would really do us a lot of good—we would make the coats, you know."

Mrs. Winslow stared wonderingly, then she gleamed approval at Wythie, though she felt called upon to conceal it. "There are thirty-six yards here, fifty-four inches wide; do you think you need so much? And it seems a pity to divide it," she said.

"Oh, no; I've no idea what it would take, but not that—still, they would have to be lined, and Mardy could dye half another color, and line with the same," stammered Wythie. "I didn't think you'd care, but if you do I'm sorry I spoke —I did not mean to ask for anything you wanted."

Having reduced Wythie to the properly humble frame of mind, Mrs. Winslow relented. "I did not say I wanted them, Oswyth," she said. "Thank goodness, your uncle, my husband, left me enough, besides all I had from my father; he was a thrifty man, and a good business-man, your Uncle Horace. I don't need old curtains, I hope. You may take a pair home—if you can carry them—and ask your mother if they can be used as you think, and how many she needs—you may have all you want of them. I'm glad to see you practical and managing; you've got the

Winslow faculty, and aren't a Grey, as I'm afraid Roberta is. I'll get you paper and twine. Go across the orchard, Oswyth; don't let folks see you taking my curtains home. Can you carry them?"

"I'll carry them, aunt; never fear, and I'll not let a soul but ourselves know where we got our splendid winter coats," cried Wythie, gleefully. And in the exuberance of her pleasure she actually kissed her aunt with an affection that really belonged to the new coats, but which surprised and pleased Aunt Azraella as if it had been her own—as indeed she thought it was.

She let Wythie out of the door in a high state of satisfaction in her own generosity which had made the girl so happy, and watched her run down the hill with a speed her heavy bundle could not at first retard. But she had to go slower at the foot of the hill; only by repeatedly sitting down on her treasure to rest, and by dragging and tugging it with both hands between halts, did she succeed in reaching the door of the little grey house.

Roberta saw her coming, and had the door open as Wythie laid her heavy burden on the steps. "What in all the wide world have you there, Wythie?" cried Rob.

"Our—winter—coats," panted Wythie, very warm and short-breathed.

"Honestly?" cried Rob, joyfully. "I thought Aunt Azraella had given you her old curtains."

"So she has, and they are our winter coats," said Oswyth, preparing to take her bundle into the house, but Rob forestalled her by seizing the twine, and she carried the treasure, bumping against her knees, to their mother.

Mrs. Grey laughed over Wythie's project, but pronounced it feasible. "You will have to let me dye them black, girlies," she said. "I would never risk all those faded stripes coming out one shade of a color. But we'll make the lining red —defects won't show there—so they shall not be sombre. I think I have some fur in the Golconda which will go around the necks, and make them really sumptuous."

"The Golconda" was the chest in which Mrs. Grey stored her remnants of better days, and which was to the girls a mine of richness, furnishing them with their few luxuries of toilet.

The kettle and the witch-stick came forth, and the kettle boiled and bubbled, and Mrs. Grey toiled and troubled to good purpose, for the handsome material of the old curtains came out a beautiful glossy black.

Mrs. Grey cut and basted, and Wythie stitched the new coats with feverish impatience for the result, and Aunt Azraella came over to see the trying on.

"Really, Mary," she said, moved almost to enthusiasm as their mother revolved Wythie and Rob by their shoulders, displaying a success exceeding her own hopes, while making chalk notes of improvements—"really, Mary, you are wonderful! You might be a tailor. It is marvellous, brought up as you were."

"My bringing up explains it, Azraella. Mother believed in teaching her children to use their hands and wits. I'll tell you, Azraella; it's that Plymouth strain you so venerate. The Pilgrim mothers wove and span, and my tailoring must be a case of pure heredity," said Mrs. Grey, laughing with a girlish mischievousness that rarely found expression. Wythie and Rob were just beginning to be old enough to realize that their mother was young.

The coats were finished, and really were triumphs. Aunt Azraella was so pleased with her curtains for turning out so creditably to her that she actually produced from the treasure-house of her attic, which the girls longed to ravage, handsome buttons to adorn the coats, and enough rich

velvet for hats for all three nieces. Wythie made jaunty little muffs from the material of the coats, and behold, from being shabby, she and Rob were transformed into an external splendor that enabled them to look their sister maidens in the face with equable minds.

But aside from this windfall matters grew worse, rather than better, in the little grey house. Everything that they could deny themselves the Greys went without. Prue rebelled against her childish fare of rice and molasses, and declared her eyes were growing almond-shaped from over-indulgence in that celestial and nuptial grain.

Rob sang her a pleasing extemporaneous ditty about

"Little Prue–sing, poor little thing!
Lived upon 'lasses and rice,
But she turned up her nose and said: 'Under the rose,
I'd rather have something more nice.'
But I said: 'O my Sweet, it will give you small feet,
And won't you consider the price?'"

Prue looked less pleased with the ditty than she might have been, and Wythie, "the olive-

branch," as Rob called her, said, hastily: "We've a Japanese kitten, so we oughtn't to mind being just a trifle Mongolian, Prudy. Come here, Kiku-san." For Kiku-san was wearing his most serene and sanctified expression, and that look usually preceded his breaking something.

"Prudence, mavourneen, the Grey dawn is breaking," sang Rob, with immense expression. "And you know it is always darkest before dawn. Just wait—only wait a little while longer, my child, and Patergrey will compress all our troubles with his coal-dust, and consume them forever. Wait for the machine, Goldilocks."

But away down in her stanch and loyal heart Rob could not help feeling that it was weary waiting.

CHAPTER NINE

ITS BURDEN

"Poor and content is rich and rich enough, but poor and genteel is—pardon slang—most tough!" remarked Rob, looking over her shoulder as she knelt before the oven, and making a wry face at Wythie, unconscious of the streak of soot on her chin.

"If you could be but one, which would you rather be, poor or genteel, Rob?" laughed her mother. But there was little laughter in the eyes under a brow upon which increasing anxiety was daily making its record.

"I don't know, Mardy; I'm not sure I could tell them apart. I'm like the ladies in Cranford, and have always known them together, but vulgarity would have its consolations. We shall be vulgarly rich when the bricquette machine is in the market," said Rob.

"And in the meantime?" hinted Wythie.

"Ah, in the meantime!" Rob took her bread

from the oven and pulled herself on her feet by the aid of the lid-lifter, conveniently extending its handle from the back lid of the stove. Mother and daughters looked sadly through the open door into the dining-room and sighed. The sunshine struck the mahogany tea-table, with the clover-leaf corners of its dropped leaf; on the old mahogany sideboard, with its rounded ends and slender, straight legs and glass knob-handles, and on the old pewter tankards and platters, and the blue and white china standing upon it.

The Greys' troubles had reached a crisis; there was immediate and imperative need of ready money, and Aunt Azraella had been over on the preceding night "to talk common-sense" to her kindred-in-law.

"It's ridiculous," that Spartan woman had said, "for people situated as you are to have so much money tied up in old furniture. Here are these things—sideboard, table, chairs, pewter, old china; there are those old bureaus, the highboy, the tester-bed, the bookcases, the work-tables—you have two—the old desk, not to mention the various chairs and tables scattered through the house. Even a dealer would give you a great deal for them, though private sale is

better. But you cling to them, and won't part with them either way!"

"They are not only the delight of our eyes, Azraella; they are heirlooms from both sides. Some of them have been in the little grey house for more than a hundred years. How could we part with them?" Mrs. Grey gently replied.

"Necessity knows no law," Aunt Azraella answered, in one of those convenient pellets of wisdom always ready compounded for infallible persons to administer to the weak-minded. "I'll tell you what I will do, Mary. I will take the things off your hands at a fair appraisal, and give you cash down."

Mrs. Grey did not thank her; she had long known that Mrs. Winslow coveted the beautiful and venerable treasures of the little grey house, and longed to transfer them to her more pretentious, black-walnut-infested house on the hill. So Mrs. Grey did not feign gratitude for her offer; indeed, it inspired her with a perfectly natural desire to hold her splendid old mahogany at any cost. She said, firmly: "I shall not part with these things while we can exist without doing so, Azraella," and Mrs. Winslow had departed in highly disgusted dudgeon.

But now, regarding their treasures in the clear

morning light, and without Aunt Azraella, the Greys wondered if their decision had been wrong, and it was their duty to give up those precious belongings which seemed more really kin to them than many of the animate connections transmitted to them through dead-and-gone ancestors. Two alternatives stared them in the face: to sell the furniture, or mortgage the little grey house. Thus far the dear little old home had been as free from burden as in its first building, when a Grey had hewn its walls from the forest with his own hands, and dug its cellar, and piled its stone foundations from the rocks of its own meadows, helped only by the friendly hands of other pioneers. It was not possible to regard a mortgage upon it calmly; for sentiment's sake in the first place, and then because its interest would be a continual burden long after the ready money it had given them would have been changed into the necessities of life.

"Still, Mardy," Rob began, speaking out of the thoughts they were silently exchanging, after the fashion of people who live in loving sympathetic intimacy--"still, Mardy, the mortgage could be paid off when the bricquette machine is sold, but if we gave up the furniture it would be gone forever. The mortgage is dreadful, but

it gives us another chance, while the sale would not. We shall need money only a little while longer, you know, if everything goes right."

"Oh, Rob, Rob, and if everything goes wrong?" cried Mrs. Grey, the cry wrung from her by the sudden sharp realization that her lares and penates, her home, her husband himself, threatened to slip from her forever.

"Then I will take the bricquettes' place—I am sure I am combustible enough!" cried Rob, but neither her mother nor Oswyth could smile.

Aunt Azraella came over again after dinner to renew her appeals to common-sense and for the fulfilment of her own desires. There was another conclave of elders, and Wythie and Rob, feeling the strain too great upon their nerves, escaped into the October sunshine. They came upon Frances Silsby under escort of Battalion B, coming to seek them, and half-heartedly consented to a short row on the river in the boys' long-boat, which they had christened "The Graces," because, they pointed out, it was equally appropriate to "the trio of owners and the most frequent and honored guests."

"You don't look cheerful to-day, you Grey sisters," said Basil, shipping rowlocks and oars and pushing off.

"No; even Rob is downly," said Bruce, coining a new adverb. "Is it anything we could help?"

"Not unless you are bankers," said Rob, disregarding Wythie's signals for silence. "What's the use, Wythie? France has known us ever since we were here to be known, and these new friends are just as true ones. We're having grey days without gold—that's all."

"We could be bankers," said Basil, quietly. "We have more money than we use—we big, strapping boys—and that's what makes us so sorry and ashamed when we think of girls like you being bothered."

"We said the other day we wished you would let us be your bankers—it would only be till the machine was done," added Bruce, flushing. He did not say that they and Frances, whose father was the wealthiest man in Fayre, had vainly tried to hit upon a way of making life easier to the girls of whom they were so fond.

Rob shook her head with a dubious smile, and Bruce said, hastily: "Oh, I know you won't! There's always just that difference between a girl's friendship and a boy's. A boy not only will share with his chum—girls do that—but he will take his share of his chum's possessions, and

know it does not matter which happened to have more."

"Don't you think there has to be that difference, Bruce?" asked Wythie, in her womanly little way. "You wouldn't like to have a girl accept too much from another." Wythie did not say, "From a boy friend." "Since Rob has said so much I will tell you that you could not be our bankers, for we need too much, and it is too serious. Aunt Azraella, Mrs. Winslow——"

"Who has nothing whatever to do with soothing-sirup, nor sirup, nor soothing of any sort," interrupted Rob.

"Wants us to sell our dear, beautiful old china and pewter and mahogany. But we won't—we can't!" Wythie finished.

"Of course not; I should say not!" ejaculated silent Bartlemy, the artist, with profound conviction.

"It would be like selling 'the ashes of your fathers and the temples of your gods,'" added Basil.

"Yes, and leave us worse off by and by, when we had used the money," added Rob. "But if we don't do that we must mortgage the little grey house."

"That's bad, too," said Bruce.

"It's worse than you see at first, because it means keeping up the interest, besides lessening the value of the old place," said Rob. "My brethren and sister Frances, I *must* earn money."

Frances clasped the hand Rob held out to her, and patted it silently. Her pretty, happy face had grown distressed; she had loved Rob as a superior being since she had been taken by her nurse to see Rob's collection of dolls, and she fully realized how bitter it was to all the Greys to put a burden upon the home which always seemed more like a member of the family than its shelter.

The Rutherfords rowed on in silence awhile, then Bruce squared his shoulders and threw back his head with a cheerful smile for the girls. "Well, if you must mortgage, don't worry about it. Everybody has a mortgage—they are as common as family cats. And when the machine is done you can pay it off again, and that will be in a short time. It really isn't worth talking about," he said, cheerfully.

Rob gave him a grateful look. "That's what I say, Bruce!" she cried.

"And isn't it great that your father has no more heart attacks?" added Basil, desiring to contribute his underscore mark to some item of

cheer on the page of life the Greys were at present conning.

"It's wonderful, too," said Wythie, "for he works as hard as though Dr. Fairbairn had never warned him—but he doesn't look well."

"I think you can earn money, Rob; I think I know a way for you to do it," said Frances. "I've been wondering if it were possible, and I'll talk to mamma to-night—it needs her help—and then to-morrow I'll come to talk to you about it."

"So cheer up, Grey sisters; this is your last pull," said Basil.

"I wonder if it is," said Wythie, watching the strong, steady strokes as The Graces sped up the river under Basil and Bartlemy's rowing.

"Oh, no; there's Indian summer to come; we'll row lots of times this year, and all next season. I did not mean this kind of pull," smiled Basil.

"I know. Where are you taking us?" asked Wythie; she could not bear just then to hear an allusion to another year.

"Up here to a tree which we discovered yesterday, and which other little boys haven't discovered—it's full of chestnuts," said Bruce.

The boat glided toward the right bank, crowned by flaming maples, and into a narrow creek, so narrow that the boys had to draw in

their oars and pull The Graces along by the shrubs on either hand. They stopped directly under a great chestnut-tree, and Bruce cried, pointing triumphantly to the branches crowded with opening burs: "There! Isn't truth more chestnutty than fiction?"

"Why didn't you tell us?" asked Rob, reproachfully. "We could have gone back for something to put them in."

Forgetting poverty for the moment in the riches provided by nature and autumn, Wythie and Rob climbed cheerfully over the side of the boat, and taking off their jackets began filling them with chestnuts as eagerly as if they had been squirrels dependent upon them for their winter existence. There was little time to get many of the satiny nuts, for the Greys were impatient to learn the fate of the little grey house, and to console their mother, who would need consolation for whatever decision had been reached. Regretfully they turned their backs on the wealth of nuts and the beautiful, peaceful spot, with its gorgeous colors, and damp, delicious odors.

Bruce and Bartlemy rowed down. Frances was very silent, and held Rob's hand fast; Rob did not feel like talking, and Wythie was never

a chatterbox, so the party came down the river very quietly, all thoughts centered on the same point—the Greys' difficulties. As they drew up at the little pier which the Rutherfords had built for their landing-place, Basil said, breaking a long silence: "Wythie and Rob, I want you to give us your solemn promise that if ever you think we can be of any use or comfort, you will say so. I don't believe you understand what it has been to us to have you girls take us right into the little grey house and big Grey hearts, and treat us like one of yourselves. It will be downright unkind if you shove us off now, for the first time, and don't let us have the privileges you've accustomed us to. Brothers are not meant only for bright days, you know."

"We would ask you to do anything, Basil; of course we would," said Wythie. "There is nothing to be done now."

"But you will consider us comrades of the true sort; not the kind you like only for what you can do for them and to frolic with," persisted Basil.

" 'Ere's our 'earts and 'ere's our 'ands," said Rob, melodramatically laying her left hand on her heart and extending her right. "Seriously, boys," she added, "we understand, and we'll do

just what you want us to. We're going to regard you as crutches—a trifle long, perhaps, but by no means to be cut off. If you were all as Grey as we are, we couldn't count you greater props than we do now. We're friends for life, and for scrapes on either side—and we're more grateful than I sound. This is rather a hard time for the Greys, but we've read lots of story-books, and we know when the lovely heroines are in mortal danger there's certain rescue on the next page. So we're going to finish these paragraphs as quickly as we possibly can, and turn over to the next chapter."

She impulsively held out both hands as she ceased speaking, wrinkling up the corners of her eyes in her merry fashion, though there were tears on the lashes.

Bruce seized the firm little hands, with the honorable burn on one forefinger, and the thumb-nail blackened by hammering, and shook them warmly. Basil followed suit, and then all three shook hands with Wythie—it was rather like a fresh treaty of allegiance before going into battle. Then Bartlemy locked the oars and rowlocks into the boat-house and the Rutherfords and Frances escorted the Greys to their own gate, where they left them with a reassuring

pat on each arm, and Wythie and Rob ran into the house.

They heard voices in the parlor and paused in the hall to listen. Their mother's and father's, Aunt Azraella's, and two strange men's voices they had just decided them to be, when Prue's golden head, much dishevelled, appeared over the banisters.

"Come up here, girls, come up here," she said, in a stage-whisper, gesticulating wildly. "Where have you been? Come; I'm half dead." Prue's cheeks were tear-stained and her voice husky; Oswyth and Rob hastened to her.

"What has happened?" Rob demanded.

Prue threw her arms around Wythie—her favorite sister—and dropped her golden head on her breast. "They're mortgaging the little grey house—oh dear, oh dear!" she sobbed.

Wythie drew Prue into her room, Rob following, very pale, and shut the door.

"Already?" Wythie said.

"This moment," said Prue, tragically. "When I came home Aunt Azraella was here, and still talking about our selling the furniture. Then papa seemed to lose all patience, and to want to have it over with. He said: 'Mr. Barker told me he was ready to take the mortgage and

give me the money any moment I would call him over. Prue, go tell him now that I am ready to mortgage the house—that I'm waiting for him. And then go fetch lawyer Dinsmore. I must get it done, and stop discussing it; it takes too much nervous strain, and too much time from my work.' I looked at Mardy, and she looked miserable, but she only said: 'Go, Prue; hurry, child.' So I went. And they've been mortgaging down there for half an hour. They ought to be done soon, I should think: how long does it take to put on a mortgage?"

"Oh, I don't know, I do not know," moaned Rob, throwing herself face downward on the bed. "How long does it take to get one off, you'd better ask."

Prue looked hurt. "You can't care more than I do, Rob Grey," she said. "I've cried and cried, and I thought I'd die when I told Mr. Barker and Mr. Dinsmore to come."

Oswyth had sunk into her rocking-chair, the tears raining down her white cheeks. She held out her arms to Prue, who fled to them, very ready to be petted.

"Poor little Prue!" said Wythie. "And you were all alone to bear it. Poor, pretty little Prudy!"

Kiku, who was the most loving of little creatures, jumped up to rub his face against Rob's, not minding its wetness, and making soft, cooing sounds to her as if she were a kitten and he her cat-mother. The gentle, dumb, little creature comforted Rob more than spoken love could have done. She rolled over and kissed the cat between his pink-lined ears, and, seeing Wythie looking so grief-stricken, characteristically began to surmount her own trouble. "Now, doen't, doen't, my dear," she said, in the words of Ham Pegotty. "It's a blow that knocked me down for a minute, but I'm not going to lie prostrate long. We'll clear off the mortgage—Patergrey, the machine, and I—in a twinkling, and the little grey house shall be Greyer than ever."

Wythie shook her head, and at that moment they heard the front door shut and footsteps go down the walk. And in the hall their mother was saying: "There are those poor children upstairs alone; we must go comfort them, Sylvester."

There was no time to feign indifference before the door of the girls' room opened, and it was rather a dismal scene upon which Mr. and Mrs. Grey looked as they entered.

Mrs. Grey took Wythie and Prue into a comprehensive embrace, just as they sat. "Dearies, you must not grieve," she cried.

"Don't look so dismal, girls," said Mr. Grey, cheerfully. "The little grey house has merely lent the thin Grey man a thousand dollars, which he knows—doesn't think, mind you, but *knows* —he will soon repay. We are fortunate to get money when we need it so sorely, and we shall pay off that mortgage in a short time; isn't that true, Rob, my son?"

"That is true, Patergrey," responded Rob, loyally and promptly.

"We're not afraid, are we, Rob, my son? We know our machine is bound to succeed."

"Bound to succeed, Patergrey," said Rob, going over to him and laying a hand on her father's shoulder as though she were really the "son" he called her.

But that night, when Wythie, tired out, lay sleeping beside her, Rob's dark eyes were staring into the blackness, slumber completely driven from them by the events of the day, as she thought anxious thoughts for her sixteen years, and feverishly laid fruitless plans for being useful.

And that night, because of the over-excitement

and the pang the decision he had reached had cost him, Mr. Grey had the second attack of the heart affection which threatened the Greys with a greater sorrow than the burden which had just been laid upon the little grey house.

CHAPTER TEN

ITS POSSIBILITIES

Frances appeared early on the following morning, and found sad faces to greet her where she usually found cheer.

"Well, what have you to propose to me, Francie, a secretaryship to the President, or to write the best-selling book of the year?" asked Rob, trying to speak brightly.

"The book is the nearer guess," said Frances. "I tried to think of what you could do best, and it was a puzzle. You are such a Jack-of-all-trades——"

"And we know what he amounts to," interrupted Rob. "You might as well finish the proverb."

"No such thing," declared Frances. "But you didn't seem to have any marked vocation, till suddenly it flashed upon me that you had done one thing wonderfully ever since you could

talk, and I knew I'd hit it. Do you know what it is?"

Rob shook her head. "I had a talent for getting into scrapes, and you used to pull me out, but I never supposed the talent had market value. If you've discovered it has, you've pulled me out of another scrape with flying colors," she said.

"You could tell stories," said Frances.

"France, I was always truthful," said Rob, reproachfully.

"Now, don't be silly; you know what I mean," retorted Frances. "Don't you remember how you used to amuse all the rest of us children telling stories by the yard? And do you realize how children love to be with you? You have a regular fringe of small fry at your heels whenever you appear abroad."

"Well, I admit the Pied Piper qualities, and I remember telling stories, but I fail to see what you're getting at, ma'am," said Rob, dubiously.

"You're to tell your stories for money!" cried Frances, triumphantly. "You're to have a class of all the nice girls and boys in Fayre—and some will come from Thruston—and you are to entertain them by telling them stories for an hour and a half twice a week. You won't charge much—maybe only five dollars for twenty recitals, but

that, if you had twenty children, would be a hundred dollars in ten weeks, and it would be just fun—no trouble at all to you to do it."

"You have thought out details, Frances," said Mrs. Grey. "You make me feel as though it were not only possible, but an accomplished fact."

"It is possible, Mrs. Grey," said Frances. "Mamma knows a lady in town who did it there, and it was a great success. She thinks Rob is sure of being even more successful, because she is so young the children will enjoy more being with her."

"And what kind of stories am I to tell, Frances? Any kind that keeps them quiet? Fayre is not like New York, where there are lots of people with wealth, but no place nor time to amuse their children. People here won't care about having their children entertained," said Rob, sensibly.

"Oh, I forgot that part," said Frances, eagerly. "No, of course, it couldn't be any kind of story. You are to tell them a set of Grecian Mythology stories, for instance; then a Round Table set, then a Crusading set, then, maybe a Shakespeare set, and stories of Rome, Greece, Egypt—goodness! There's no end to

the series you can get up! Now wait!" she added, as Rob started to speak. "You know when we were little you read all these things, and loved them; we thought them dry, and nothing would have induced us to read them for ourselves. But when you told us about them we were like so many young robins, when the big bird chops up food too solid for them—we were all agape for more, and you had the faculty of making us see the beauty, and not missing a point. It was enthusiasm and magnetism, mamma says. Well, you have those gifts just as much now."

"I'll try to believe in my talents," said Rob, meekly.

"You'd better. Mamma told me to lay the plan before you all, and, if you approve, to say she will guarantee Rob a class of not less than twenty to begin with, and she will find the children for her. Will you try it, Rob?" asked Frances, eagerly.

"How good your mother is; how kind you both are!" exclaimed Mrs. Grey.

"Oh, France always was clear, unadulterated splendidness," said Rob, getting up to hug the one girl friend she had ever really loved. "How can I help but try it, when it is all done for me?

Of course, I'll be only too glad to try it, Francie, and I'll do my best."

"I couldn't possibly fail to approve, approve gladly and gratefully," said Mrs. Grey.

"I think it's a beautiful plan—an inspiration, Frances," said Wythie. "And I know Rob can do it like no one else; she does such things with her face and voice that she always makes one see what she sees." And Oswyth smiled proudly on Rob.

"I should hate to fail, after your mother had done so much to launch me," said Rob.

" 'Screw your courage to the sticking-point and we'll not fail,' " said Frances, who could hardly have been less like Lady Macbeth.

"Then, if I succeed, I might enlarge my field, have classes in neighboring towns, and by and by in Hartford and New Haven, and—why not? —New York," cried Rob, airily. "Then if the bricquette machine did turn out badly I could support the family."

"Rob, Rob, I thought you had no doubt of the invention!" cried her mother, such a sharp note of pain in her voice that it betrayed her own doubt, and her unconscious dependence on the young girl's opinion, ignorant though it was.

"Neither have I, Mardy, it's sure—don't be

afraid," said Rob, hastily. "But when you want a thing so dreadfully, *dreadfully* much you can't help thinking what it would be not to get it. And I feel as the Red Queen must have felt when she was a little girl, and had to believe three impossible things before breakfast. I do believe, but I have to try—try with both hands, as Her Red Majesty told Alice to do—to keep my faith, though I know it's all right all the while. And the invention is so nearly completed, Francie, that Patergrey thinks that next week he can write to the people in New York whom he wants to have buy it. Isn't that a comfort, after so long? It sounds so definite."

"Indeed it does!" cried Frances, heartily. Mrs. Grey hastily left the room, and Wythie ran after her, guessing that she had gone to hide sudden tears.

Rob looked after them soberly. "Oh, France," she said, "you could not have come with your plan at a better time—we need cheering. They put the mortgage on the little grey house yesterday—they were doing it when we came home. And Patergrey got so wrought up that he had another of those dreadful heart attacks last night."

"Oh, Rob; poor, dear, brave Rob! I am so

sorry for you!" cried Frances, with ready tears of sympathy and a convulsive hug.

Rob shook herself free. "Now, don't pity me!" she cried. "I have all I can do to keep steady if I am as hard as nails, and you see I *must* keep gay for the others. I know, France; we know each other, but don't love me now! No one could have done me the good you have in giving me the hope of being useful. I'll never forget how you came in this black morning and tried to 'push dem clouds away'—you have made a big rift. If ever I get rich and famous I'll give you your heart's desire, and if ever I can help you while I'm poor—which may be a while yet, you know—I'll walk over the ocean to do it. But don't you love me nor pity me to-day."

"All right. I don't love you any day; I despise you, and always did," said Frances, with a last squeeze as she withdrew her arms. "Now I must run home to tell mamma you are unanimous. She said if you liked the plan she would see all the parents she could this afternoon, and bid them send their little lambs for you to pipe to them."

"Well, Francie, Patergrey does want me, so I suppose I ought to let you go," said Rob. "Tell your blessed mother I can never thank her,

but tell her how troubled you found us, and she will understand the good she has done."

Rob hardly knew how it happened that at the end of two weeks she found herself established as a Scheherazade, telling stories, not to an Eastern tyrant, but to five-and-twenty lesser tyrants —not less tyrannical—with the east in their bright eyes.

Mrs. Silsby had bestirred herself so energetically that Rob's childish audience was not only secured for her at once, but exceeded by five the twenty she had hoped to get. Mr. Grey said children were showered upon her as if she were a foundling asylum.

Their ages ranged between eleven and six, the average being eight, and Roberta wondered how she was ever going to interest them, restless as so many butterflies, and inclined to approach suspiciously an entertainment which they suspected of being improving, and very possibly additional lessons under a hypocritical disguise. But they were worth winning, for all of the audience was paid for in advance, and bewildered Rob found a hundred and twenty-five dollars in her hands, which was all her own.

Mrs. Silsby managed the financial end of Rob's enterprise, as she had its other details,

which was lucky, for Rob would never have dared to offer course-tickets to her stories, with no rebates for absences. But Mrs. Silsby said five dollars was so absurdly little for twenty entertainments that nothing else was to be considered, and Rob yielded, suggesting only that at the top of her little programmes were printed: "Mrs. James Silsby presents Miss Roberta Grey," after the fashion of a great New York manager, and that at the bottom be added: "Treasurer and Press Agent, Mrs. J. H. Silsby."

There was some difficulty about Rob's title. Every lad and lassie in her audience—all of whom she had known from their cradles—hailed her "Hallo, Rob," when they met in the highway, but as a Scheherazade the case was different, and her scant dignity of sixteen needed reenforcing.

Mrs. Dinsmore, the lawyer's wife, who was a great stickler for propriety, insisted that her two hopefuls should say "Miss Roberta," and advised Rob to exact this title from the others. But Dorothy Dinsmore herself settled the question by refusing to consider it.

"I wouldn't say Miss Roberta for anything, mamma," she declared. "I might say Roberta, but I'd rather say Miss Rob, if I must do any-

thing silly, because you can just slide over that, and say ''S Rob'—and it wouldn't make much difference."

"I would rather be called Rob than Srob," laughed Rob. "Oh, let them go, Mrs. Dinsmore! It's going to be as nice a time as I can make it for them, and I suspect it will be nicer if we don't try to make them forget I'm just a bigger child than they are."

The result was that at Rob's first recital, though the children began decorously in their places, dubious as to what was to befall them, they soon discovered that it was not a prim teacher, but "just Rob Grey," the Rob Grey they had always known, who was telling them the most delightful story they had ever heard. It was a story as full of magical impossibilities as the fairy-tales that the girls loved, and as full of the clash of arms, and the fury of battle, and the prowess of knights as the boys could ask.

And behold, before she was half-way through, each of the twenty-five of her audience had left his seat, and the children were hanging, entranced and adoring, on the back, arms, and rounds of her chair, huddling at her feet and leaning on her knees, and she knew that she was succeeding beyond her fondest hopes.

Her first series was the Arthurian legends; Rob had prepared the first story carefully and told it well, for she loved romance, chivalry, and the poetry of history as every imaginative girl does, and the inspiration of the fifty bright eyes, the eager lips, open as if to drink in her words, made her lose herself as completely as when a few years before, a little girl herself, she had told these stories to her playmates.

Rob came home from her first recital—Mrs. Silsby had perfected her kindness by lending her big parlor for the tale-telling—in the highest feather.

"I'm a mediæval minstrel, a bard, a minnesinger," she declared. "And, best of all, I'm a success. I may become a monologist, at ever so much a night. Why, the children hung on my words—and they hung on my back and arms and knees besides."

Prue, who had a strong sense of dignified propriety, was scandalized. "You don't mean to say, Rob," she exclaimed, "that you let those children swarm all over you? Why, they ought to have kept their seats strictly."

"Well, they didn't; they left them laxly." Rob laughed outright at Prue's horrified face.

"My dear spinster-sister Prudence, children

can't half listen if they don't wriggle—they must fidget about, or they get deaf in their brains—not their ears. You used to swarm all over me when I told you stories."

"I was your sister," said Prue, convincingly.

"Yes, you were; I even fancy sometimes you haven't outgrown being my sister," said Rob. "Proper or not, the dear little crowd had a perfectly scrumptious time, and they wanted me to promise to tell them a story every day. You see, I'm already like a sort of serial, which doesn't come out often enough. But the best of it is, I am actually earning money and helping my family."

"You have always been the greatest help, Rob dear," said Mrs. Grey. "You have been our tonic ever since you were old enough to feel sympathy, and that was long ago."

"If I'm a tonic, Wythie must be cold cream, or something healing, and Prue—what is Prudy? Violet extract to keep us dainty, I suspect," said Rob.

If Rob was glad and thankful for her success, Frances was triumphantly glorying in it. She never had been an especially clever child, while Rob had been a brilliant little creature, the pride of her teachers, who invariably brought her for-

ward when the credit of the school was to be maintained—this was in their early childhood, and during the irregular periods when Rob had been at school. Now the humdrum girl had devised the scheme which was to make clever Rob's fortune, as if the moth had unexpectedly furnished the wick to the candle, and Frances was as proud as she was delighted in its results.

The Rutherford boys hailed Rob a story-teller with irreverent glee. Contributions from one or another of Battalion B poured in daily—sometimes from all three at once. Maria Edgeworth's Moral Tales—to supplement Rob's, if "her grey matter gave out," Basil's accompanying note stated; a bunch of rattan-rods, slates, primers, spectacles, and a cap for herself. Even a false front came from Bruce—most frankly false, with a muslin parting, and yellow in color, because, he explained, he "thought yellow would contrast prettily with her dark eyes, and her cap would hide its not matching her own brown locks." Bartlemy illuminated a set of mottoes to adorn the walls of what the boys called "Rob's auditorium." "Little Children Must Never Tell Stories," "Listen to My Tale of Woe," "As Tedious as a Twice-Told Tale," "Young Robin Grey Came a-Courtin' We," "Truth is Stranger

(Here) Than Fiction," "Plain Tales for the Bills," three for a side of the room. Rob hung these brilliant productions, and piled up all her other tributes from Battalion B in a small, unused room under the "lean-to" roof, where twice a week she retired to prepare her story for the next recital.

In spite of the boys' ridicule, in spite of Aunt Azraella's croaking, Rob's experiment was proving more successful each week. But the pleasantest part of it all to Rob was when her father appealed to her as a capitalist to aid in launching the invention.

"It is all done, Rob, practically finished," said Mr. Grey, laying a trembling hand on the girl's shoulder one morning at the end of two hours' close work together.

"Don't get excited, Patergrey; you know it is forbidden you," cried Rob, beginning to quiver in sympathy. "Yes, it's done. Sit down; you look pale—let me get you a tablet."

"Rob, you've been my right hand—my extra pair of hands—all the way through," said her father, impatiently waving away the suggestion of a tablet. "You've had so much faith, dear son Rob, and have understood so clearly that you have helped me in that way almost more than in

any other. Now I am going to ask you to help me still further. Have you any special use for the first hundred and twenty-five dollars from your story-telling?"

"So many special uses that I've no special use —no, Patergrey," laughed Rob. "There are so many things to be done with it that I can't see one for the crowd of them. It is all for Mardy and Wythie, though. They go without so slyly that I want every penny of this to buy things for them."

"You generous Rob-of-mine!" exclaimed her father. "Then would it disappoint you to lend me rather more than half of your wealth, to launch the bricquette machine? It requires a very small capital, but it needs that to start it on its journey into the world. I should rather like to have my girl's money—the very first that she ever earned—do this for the invention in which she has had such a share through its entire growth."

"Like it, Patergrey! I'd love it!" cried Rob, her eyes dilating, her cheeks flushing. "I'll get the money now—I've hidden it in my twine-bag, real country fashion. How strange for my money to launch the machine! Can it do it, really, Patergrey?"

"It really can. I will take but fifty dollars now, Rob, but I may need more. There must be photographs and plates made, some printing done. I would prefer your money to do this, if the idea pleases you."

For further answer Rob kissed her father as he ceased speaking, and ran away to fetch the money, singing at the top of her voice.

That night were mailed to New York the first letters introducing to a larger world than had yet heard of it the bricquette machine upon which the hopes of the Greys hung, and into which all the energy of Sylvester Grey's apparently unfruitful life had passed.

Wythie, who was always ready for bed long before Rob, sat in the rocking-chair, a shawl over her white gown, watching, with eyes of loving envy, Rob's frantic brushing of her unruly hair.

"I think I shall be wickedly jealous of you," she said at last. "Fancy your launching the invention! I wish I were able to help as you do."

"You, Oswyth! You're not only an Anglo-Saxon saint, but a Connecticut angel," cried Rob, somewhat inarticulately, as she held between her teeth the elastic band with which she intended to fasten her braid. "Without you we would all

go—kersmash!—in one day. You do everything."

"Do you remember how, when we reckon our resources, we put down two columns, one certainties, the other possibilities? To think you are now one of the possibilities!" persisted Wythie.

"And if I am, what then?" demanded Rob. "I may be a possibility, but you are an extreme probability, Oswyth, my dear. You are at once a column and a foundation. I'll never be half as useful as you are. Put out the light, Oswyth Grey, and don't talk nonsense! Not but that I'm thankful enough to be added to the column of possible sources of income!"

CHAPTER ELEVEN

ITS HOPE

"Here's a bit of bread for you, Rob, my son," called Mr. Grey from his doorway, waving an envelope alluringly toward Rob, who was on her knees dusting the stairs.

"Bread? I'm not hungry, Patergrey; besides, it looks too white to be well baked. What do you mean? Something nice, by the way you're beaming at me." And Rob arose from her humble posture to go to her father and investigate.

"It is bread—bread-on-the-waters, my girl," Mr. Grey retorted. "It is the first interest on the money you lent me."

"The machine?" cried Rob, trying to seize the letter which her father held tantalizingly above her head. "Oh, tell me quick if it is the machine."

"It is the machine. But we mustn't expect too much," Mr. Grey hastily added. "It is by

no means sold, nor even appraised. This letter is from a man in New York who is interested in such things, and he writes that he is coming to Fayre the day after to-morrow to look into my improvements in bricquette making. That's all, but it is a beginning, and that's something in itself."

"It's a lot!" cried sanguine Rob. "What shall we have for dinner that day? Have you told Mardy?"

"I have but just come in," said her father, laughing aloud. "What a practical girl! And how truly her instinct guides her to the wisdom of feeding well the man whom you wish to impress! Do the best you can with the dinner, Robin, and maybe he won't discover defects in the invention."

"There is none," retorted Rob, going off with a skip and a jump to impart the news to her mother and Wythie, and consult with them on ways and means.

The second day dawned clear and cold and brought with it, on the noon train, the anxiously awaited arbitrator of the fate of the bricquette machine.

Mr. Grey went to the station to meet him, and Wythie, Rob, and Prue watched their approach

to the little grey house from behind the muslin curtains in their chamber.

There was an air of assurance and power about the stranger which filled Wythie with fear of his judgment, and inspired Rob with confidence.

"Of course he will approve the machine if he knows what he's about," said Rob, "and he most certainly looks as though he knew."

Dinner was served at once, and Mr. Marston —by this name Mr. Grey presented his guest to his wife and daughters—Mr. Marston was enthusiastic in word and deed over his pleasure in what, he said, he never found in the city—old-fashioned, home cooking, prepared by the hands of ladies.

"You really have no business with a successful invention, Mr. Grey," said the guest—"you who are already so rich." And he smiled up into Prue's face, who had risen to remove his plate, with a look that conveyed his high sense of her value, and so embarrassed the child that she dropped his knife and fork with a clatter.

"I don't like him," Rob confided to Wythie, when their father had borne Mr. Marston away for a preliminary smoke—like his colonial ancestors dealing with the Connecticut aborigines—leaving the girls with their mother to their task

of clearing away. "I don't like him—he's too good to be true—but if he only will like the machine my likings and dislikes don't matter."

Later Rob's father called her, and she went to help in displaying the invention which she almost felt was as much hers as her father's.

Silently she moved the parts of the machine, co-operating with her father as he talked, and silently the visitor watched the proceedings, stroking his mustache and letting nothing escape his keen eyes, as Rob saw, while she, in her turn, sharply, though furtively, eyed the impassive face concealing its owner's verdict on the Greys' hopes.

At last the exposition of the machine was over, and Rob busied herself with replacing the covers of the models, while her father and Mr. Marston dropped into neighboring chairs for its discussion.

"It's unquestionably a good thing, Mr. Grey," the visitor said. "The improvements are important, and, what is more, practical. I feel that I have no right to say anything definite until I have seen my partner, but I am perfectly within bounds in saying that I am thoroughly convinced as to the value of your patent, and that we shall be ready to make you an offer for it. At the

same time I should be glad if you will not show it to anyone else until that offer has been made and discussed; I should like to retain an option on the machine."

"When I wrote you, Mr. Marston, and allowed you to come here to see the invention, I considered it equivalent to a pledge not to allow anyone else to see what might become your property, and would be valueless to you if it were not protected," said Mr. Grey, quietly.

Rob waited to hear no more. She ran from the room, and caught Wythie and Kiku in a comprehensive embrace, meeting them as they came, one in the other's arms, across the hall.

"It's all right, it's all right, Oswyth, saint and martyr!" she cried, whirling Wythie around, and sending Kiku leaping, panic-stricken by her onslaught, to the top of the portière at the door. "He says he's thoroughly convinced of the value of the patent, and he asks Patergrey to keep it for him till he can consult with his partner as to the offer they mean to make for it. Oh, I knew, I knew all along it was coming right, but now it has come right, I'm ready to die of joy."

Wythie turned so white that Rob held her closer for another reason, fearing she was going to faint. "We must find Mardy," was all

Wythie said, but her smile was so beatific that Rob was more than satisfied.

When Mr. Grey came back from the station, where he had been to speed his guest, he found his household waiting him, half delirious with joy.

"It's all right now, isn't it, Patergrey?" cried Rob. "There's no danger in our being as glad as we please, is there? It's sure and sure that the invention will go, isn't it? That man settled it, didn't he?"

"No risk at all in rejoicing, Mary," said Mr. Grey, disregarding Rob, and answering the girl's question to his wife, to whom he held out his arms with smiling, quivering lips, and eyes bright at once with joy and tears.

"Will it be much, Sylvester?" asked Mrs. Grey, still afraid to be glad.

"The offer? It will not be less than fifty thousand, if it is to be accepted, Mary; that will put the Grey family into brighter colors, and free the little grey house of its burden again," said Mr. Grey, stroking his wife's abundant hair. "And, Rob," he added, as the girls caught their breath with a gasp of ecstasy, "make a note of the name of John Lester Baldwin, and his address on Broadway, in New York. I will give

it to you, and I want you to remind me to write him—he was a college chum of mine, an honest man and a good lawyer. I mean to take his advice as to the patent; I would trust it utterly."

Rob obediently made the memorandums on a pad, and her father straightened himself, taking a long breath. "It is a curious sensation to have succeeded, after so long," he said. "I hardly know how to adjust myself to it."

Rob and Wythie exchanged glances, noting with the anxiety they always felt for the dear father's safety, the dilation of his bright eyes and his quickened breath.

"You have done enough, Patergrey," cried Rob. "You have made the machine, and we'll do the adjusting, never fear! Mayn't I ask the boys and Frances down to-night to rejoice with us, Mardy? And won't you get your hat and coat and go with me to invite them, Patergrey? The fresh air will bring us both to our senses—I feel as though my head were a thistle in September."

"We should all be better for the boys and Frances, Rob," said her mother, and at the same moment Mr. Grey said: "Yes, let's have the young folks in, and play twirl the platter, and make molasses candy, and have a real, children's

party—I feel as though I wanted to get down to a basis of pure jollity and be thoroughly a boy, now that for the first time in years I feel the pressure of care lightened."

"Then get your hat—why, here come the boys now! Then I can't go, Patergrey! Suppose you and Mardy take a walk instead, and we'll keep Battalion B to supper, and I'll make them get it!" cried Rob.

"It would be pleasant, Mary, to celebrate by a stroll together; we don't get one of our all-to-ourselves times very often," smiled Mr. Grey. "Let's leave our girls to prepare our triumphal banquet, and pretend we're young lovers again, with no tall girls to bother us."

Mrs. Grey laughed happily, and almost ran away to get ready for her walk, and soon she was leaning on her husband's arm, and the three girls were watching her as she laughed up into his face, as they strolled in the direction of Miss Charlotte's to bring her the glad tidings of the coming of prosperity to the little grey house.

"See how young and happy Mardy looks," sighed Wythie. "Only think, if she will look like that all the time! Do you suppose, can it be, girls—and boys—that this isn't too good to be true?"

"It's just barely good enough for you to be true," said Bruce. "We don't believe that only bad things happen outside of books, do we, Rob?"

"No, sir; we believe only in good things—even when the bad ones happen!" declared Rob. "Tommy Tucker sang for his supper, but if you two big fellows want yours you've got to chop wood for kindling, or you won't get it. And, Bart, would you mind very, very much if you were asked most politely to go and fetch Frances?"

"Yes, I'd mind, because I like to be around when you're fussing, but I'm willing to offer myself a sacrifice, if nobody else will," said Bartlemy, looking around for his hat.

Poor Bartlemy could not hurry Frances sufficiently to get back to the little grey house before supper was ready, and "the fun over," as he grumblingly said. Rob patted his head like a big dog's. "Never mind, Bartie dear," she said, soothingly, "you shall wash all the greasiest pans!"

"What shall we do to celebrate?" asked Prue, when everything was cleared away, and the dining-room table rolled to the wall to allow games.

"I'll tell you," cried Mr. Grey, with an inspiration. "Let's rifle the attic and invoke our an-

cestors to enjoy with us the prospect of securing to future Greys this little house they loved. We know what treasures there are in the chests and horse-hair trunks up there, don't we, girls?"

"Oh, you never saw our old-fashioned clothing!" cried Wythie. "Why, that's the very thing, papa! Get lamps, boys, and come up to the attic. We'll dress up and have an old-folks' concert, just for ourselves. You never saw such things as we have up there!"

Older and younger, all the Greys with their four guests, and lamps enough to light the party, and with Kiku-san on behind, hoping for mice, repaired to the attic.

A pleasant musty odor of dried herbs, camphor, and cedar-wood greeted them, and queer shadows wavered big on the slanting walls to meet them.

"What a fine place!" exclaimed Basil. "Why don't we come here oftener?"

Mrs. Grey produced her keys and threw open chest after chest, and Wythie, Rob, and Prue, with enthusiastic help from Frances, began shaking out garments of more than a hundred years ago, as well as the big skirts and poke-bonnets of the '50s.

Huge embroidered collars, long, hand-

wrought lace veils, brocaded silks, frail with age; gigantic leghorn bonnets; short, much-shirred waists; high stocks for men, ruffled shirts, tight, short-waisted blue coats; the high, pointed collars in which our grandfathers did penance in the days of "Tippecanoe"; grotesque high and narrow beaver hats, and broad ones of white silk, all these were brought forth into the flickering light amid shouts of laughter and impatient clutches from hands eager to try the effect of something that particularly struck an individual fancy.

"No fair trying on up here," cried Prue, at last. "We must take everything we want downstairs, and fit ourselves out there; we'll never get down this way."

So everybody piled all that one pair of arms could carry into a great heap, and each one lifted his burden and carefully picked the way down the narrow, steep stairs, made particularly uncertain by the wavering lamp-light.

"Now, ladies to the right; gentlemen to the left," ordered Wythie. "You go into your room, papa, with the boys, and Mardy and Frances shall come into ours with us, and we'll do our best. Don't I wish you had wigs with queues!"

It took nearly three-quarters of an hour of excited hurrying and much laughter from both sides of the hall before the impromptu fancy-dress party was robed, and then at a signal nine queer figures appeared in two lines, and stopped short, each convulsed at the sight of the other.

Mr. Grey, in knee-breeches and cocked hat of an earlier period, was more imposing but not nearly as funny as Bruce in the costume of the '30s, nor as Basil, portentously scowling between the sharp collar-points like those which served as gateways to Daniel Webster's eloquence.

Bartlemy, in a long-tailed, short-waisted black coat which must have belonged to some clerical Grey, and with an incongruous white-silk hat, was so funny that Prue forgot her frail, rose-besprinkled muslin, and sat straight down on the floor to laugh at him. Wythie had found a muslin frock, short and tucked-in skirt and waist, and slippers such as Jane Austen's heroines tripped about in, and her pretty face was framed in a big leghorn hat, tied down into a poke at back and front. She looked as if she had stepped out of a Sir Joshua Reynolds portrait.

Rob had made herself into a lady of Revolu-

tionary days, hair high, and gown of brocade low in neck, and draped with an immense embroidered fichu. Prue's muslin did not much antedate the civil war, but Frances had arrayed herself in a gown which Dolly Madison would have recognized as the latest fashion had she come to life to see it.

Mrs. Grey seemed to have taken what no one else wanted, but nothing else that she had on mattered much while she wore the great pink gauze turban which crowned her hair.

"It's a real pity no one can see us," declared Frances, when they were mustered in the dining-room, and had dropped, breathless with laughter, into the old chairs which should have welcomed gladly the figures of their youth returning to them.

"We'll get up a real affair, give an old folks' concert or something, in costume—we'd have a great one," cried Bruce. "Will you, say toward spring?"

"Very likely," said Rob, "but what are we going to do now, this minute?"

"You are going to dance," said Mrs. Grey. "I'm going to play for you, and if our piano is old and thin, then you must remember that it is in old-time costume also, and not mind."

"We can have a fine square-dance," cried Prue. "Just four couples—papa, will you dance?"

"Will I? Will I not?" Mr. Grey cried, gayly. "Whose patent are we celebrating, I'd like to know? Rob and I are head couple."

He gave his hand to Rob, Basil and Wythie took one side, Bruce and Frances the other, while tall Bartlemy and Prue fell together, as they usually did.

Mrs. Grey played, concealing as well as she could, with her fine touch and real talent, time's ravages on the queer, yellow-keyed old piano.

"Now sing," ordered Mr. Grey, when, the dance over, he dropped weary, but happy, into a chair. The quaint figures with the flushed young faces gathered about the old piano, and sang as they were bidden, sang until the clock in the hall startled them by striking eleven.

"Why, I had no idea of the time!" cried Frances. "Mamma will think I'm stolen. I must hurry and get into my present-day things and fly home. We've had a lovely time, dear Grey people! There never was a place where people had so much fun without trying, and because they couldn't help it, as in the little grey house."

"And there never was a place where good luck

was more needed, nor where people were more grateful for hearing that it had come to them, than in the little grey house to-day," added Rob, as she wound her arm around her friend's waist, and bore her away to her room.

"Oh, Rob," said Frances, "and oh, Wythie," she added, turning back to include Wythie in the caress she gave Rob, "you know how glad I am of what that man told you! It's well you do, for I can't begin to tell you how glad I am. Isn't it perfectly blessed?"

"It's the beginning of the end of our troubles, that's all it is, Francie," said Rob. "This isn't the little grey house to-night; it's Pandora's box, with everything bad flying out, and only hope left."

CHAPTER TWELVE

ITS TRAGIC SIDE

"Maimie Flinders is sick," said Prue, coming in from school the next noon, and hastening to thrust first one foot and then the other into warmth issuing from the open oven-door, for the day was cold. "I met Mr. Flinders, and he said 'Maimie was pretty miserable, and they was worried about her.' " Prue pulled down the corners of her mouth, imitating Farmer Flinders's drawl as she spoke.

"I must go see her," said Rob. "Poor little Pollykins! She's a misfit in that household—a dear, quaint little soul! None but a very nice child could admire me the way that mite does. I think I owe her a cheering visit. Look out, Prudy; let me get the pudding out."

After dinner Rob girded herself in her warm, ex-parlor-curtains coat, and having selected from her accumulation of the Rutherfords' contributions to her entertainments some things that she

thought would amuse the sick child, started out to make a call which was not alluring for many reasons.

Farmer Flinders lived in a yellowish-brown house from which the green blinds that adorned it in summer had been removed to save them unnecessary wear during the winter. It was square and bare, and Rob felt its bleakness anew as she entered the gate, passing the straggling stalks which in summer developed into a lilac and syringa bush, and pulled the octagonal glass door-bell, remembering the solitary and sensitive child who was trying to grow into a woman in these surroundings.

Mrs. Flinders opened the door, cautiously displaying a little of her gaunt person.

"We heard that Maimie was sick," said Rob. "I should like to see her, if I may."

"Come in," said Maimie's mother. "She's pretty mis'rable, but if anything could do her good 'twould be seein' you. I always say that to Mr. Flinders when he's talkin' of the bother he has with your place, an' you bein' pretty spunky. 'Eliab,' I says, 'there's got to be good in a girl that children take to, an' I never see our Maimie take to anyone 's she doos to Roberta Grey. She makes her laugh,' I says, 'an' she

seems to chirk her right up.' An' you can see yourself, Roberta, that if you'd had seven children, an' all had died but jest this one, you'd take to anyone she took to yourself, no matter who 'twas."

Roberta accepted these dubious remarks as complimentary, that being, on the whole, apparently their intention, but she had considerable difficulty in keeping her face straight, for it did not seem to her necessary for Mrs. Flinders to apologize to her, either for her liking for Rob, nor for her desire to have Maimie made happy.

She followed Mrs. Flinders into the kitchen, which was also the sitting-room, and saw the little white face which she hoped to make smile, languidly looking out on the glimpse of the world allowed the child by the enormous chintz arm-chair, with its extended side-pieces, in which she was very nearly swallowed up. A long, thin, little hand came out from the plaid shawl enveloping Maimie and waved feebly to Rob, while a piping voice cried: "Oh, Rob Grey, I'm awful glad to see you!"

"That's right," cried Rob, running over to give the child a hug. "So you should be, because I'm glad to see you, though I'm not one bit glad

to see you ill. But, you see! I always told you they ought to call you Polly, and not Maimie—because it was 'little *Polly* Flinders sat among the cinders, warming her pretty little toes.' And if you're not among the cinders, you're close to the stove, Pollykins! But we're certain sure you're not the real Polly Flinders, in Mother Goose, because 'her mother came and caught her, and whipped her little daughter, for spoiling her nice new clothes.' That can't happen to you, you know, because you've got on your wrapper!"

The child laughed out. "You're funny, Rob," she said, stroking Rob's cheek.

"And you're funny, Polly; as funny as a fiddler-crab, with this big chair high up above your head, and your thin little face peering out! What do you play all day—do you play you're a little turtle and this is your shell?" laughed Rob, her heart full of pity for the wan little creature.

"Nothin'," said Polly. "I don't play nothin'; I just sit an' sit."

"Read?" hinted Rob.

Polly shook her head. "I can't read fast, 'cause I didn't go to school much, an' it makes me awful tired."

"Well, now, reading is hard work, because they won't stop writing books long enough to let us catch up," laughed Rob. "I've been telling stories, telling them to lots of little children, and we do have the most fun!"

"Father told about that," cried Polly eagerly. "He said 'twas queer folks paid to hear 'em, but I know! You've told me stories, an' I know! I wish I could be there when you tell 'em, but father wouldn't get a ticket, not ever."

"What does the doctor say about Polly, Mrs. Flinders?" asked Rob, who had been forming her own unprofessional opinion, and deciding that poor little Polly was dying of pure dreariness.

"He says she ain't any stamina, an' he's afraid she'll go like the rest. He says she don't seem to have any real disease, but too much Flinders—you know Dr. Fairbairn, an' the way he says things. I guess he means she'll go like the rest," said Mrs. Flinders, apparently oblivious to Polly's intense gaze.

Rob thought that she did indeed "know Dr. Fairbairn," and read in his diagnosis of "too much Flinders" confirmation of her own judgment on poor Polly. The mite looked so frightened at the prospect of "going like the others" that

Rob was divided between pity for the shrinking child and wondering wrath at her obtuse mother.

"Now, I'll tell you what it is, Mrs. Flinders," cried Rob, "Polly isn't going like the others; she isn't going at all. But she's sick and lonely, and I think a bit of cheering would do her more good than medicine—or even than splendid Dr. Fairbairn can do! I want you to lend us Polly. We've plenty of room in the little grey house—we always have room and time to do what we want to do—and I'll take Polly under my special charge, so the others shall not have any trouble about it. I'll tuck her up in the little bed we three girls had in turn when we were little, and we'll let her play with our dear white kitten Kiku, and she'll hear us chatter, and I'll tell her stories, and you see if she doesn't get to be another Polly in no time!"

"Oh, mother, mother!" cried Polly, starting up in uncontrollable rapture and clasping her thin hands prayerfully. "Oh, mother, mother!"

Mrs. Flinders stared at Rob in amazement, then she wiped her eyes on the corner of her faded apron. "Well, Roberta, you're a good girl, an' I'll say that for you," she said, her reserve dropping from her suddenly. "Young as

you be, you see what's the matter with Maimie. The child's just pining and pindling out of the world, an' I can't stop her. He's near; you know how he is. He's got plenty money an' no one but us, an' if Maimie dies, what's the use of it all? But he won't send the child away—says it's all nonsense. An' the house 's lonely, an' I can't amuse her, an' so I stand by an' see her going the way they all went, till it seems 's if there wa'n't enough vim in me to git her supper—let alone savin' her. If you could—and would—take her awhile, I know she'd come right up. But they ain't many's 'd do it, an' I guess he's been tryin' enough to you fer you not to feel gret interest in his child. An' what'd your folks say?"

"I'd do anything I could for dear little Polly, Mrs. Flinders," said Rob. "And as to my mother and father, the one thing that makes them happy is a chance to do a slight kindness for someone. You needn't be afraid that Polly won't be welcome. I know, or I wouldn't have spoken—or at least not until I had first consulted them. You get her ready, and I'll ask the Rutherford boys to come here and carry her off to the little grey house. Will Mr. Flinders let her go?"

"He'll do anything as long's it don't come out of him," said Mrs. Flinders, bitterly. "I know in his heart he'll be pleased, for this child's the only thing he doos care about. An' I guess you no need to ask those boys to fetch her; we've got a horse, an' if she's goin' visitin' I'll see she gets there properly."

"Then it's settled!" cried Rob, and, turning to Polly, who had been listening to this conversation with her breath fluttering over her parted lips, and color coming and going in her pinched face, she added: "Are you glad to come, Polly-kins?"

"Glad, Rob!" cried little Polly. "It'll be 'most heaven. I'm sure I'll have a better time than the others."

And Rob knew that she referred to the other little Flinders, and was as delighted with Polly's gratitude as if she had not seen how much the small creature dreaded following them to greater happiness than the little grey house could give her.

When Rob announced at home the prospective visitor there was consternation for a time, but it was not long before her mother and Wythie were planning for Polly's comfort with as much pleasure as Rob felt, and Prue fell to washing

and setting in order the wardrobe of her discarded doll for Polly's delectation.

Mrs. Flinders drove the child over in the buggy with the purpling wheel-spokes and the wood obtruding through the back of the seat. Polly was wrapped so closely that only her dilated eyes showed, and her mother sat, uncompromising and severe, beside her, hauling on the reins which guided the temperate horse.

The Rutherfords were at the grey house when the little invalid arrived, and Bruce's strong arms lifted her out with a gentleness that warranted his choice of vocation, and bore her into the warmth of the open fire in the dining-room.

"These are her drops," said Mrs. Flinders, setting a bottle on the table. "We're very much obliged to you for taking Polly, Mis' Grey. He's obliged too—I guess he's some ashamed of being so cantankerous to you about the garden truck. If she's troublesome you let me know, an' I'll fetch her back."

"She will trouble us only by looking pale," said Mrs. Grey. "If she gets better as fast as we hope to have her she will trouble us no more than a little cricket on our hearth."

"We shall have to hide Polly from Aunt Azraella," said Wythie, returning from seeing

Mrs. Flinders's departure. "If she disapproved of our extravagance in having a kitten, what will she say to a child in the house?"

"We always have plenty of what we don't want," said Rob. "We run no risk of impoverishing ourselves in sharing our deprivations with Pollykins."

"It's a funny little grey house, with all its bothers," said their mother. "It always seems to be able to bear a bit more—that often cheers me when I think it has almost more than it can bear."

"We have to go up to the attic, Pollykins, to put away lots and lots of old clothes—the oldest kind of old clothes!" said Rob, on her knees before Polly, unbuttoning the child's coat. "Some day, when it's warmer, or you're strong enough to go where it's cold, I'll show you the funniest old hats and bonnets and dresses you ever saw in all your little life! We don't like to put them away, but we must. Last night we dressed up in them, and danced, and so to-day we have to pay the fiddler—that means we have to pack them all away again, whether we like to or not. You won't mind if you have to stay here alone with Hortense, do you? That's the doll's name.

By and by Prudy will come in, and we shall be down soon."

"I don't mind, Rob," said Polly, eying Hortense longingly. "I'll play house and rock that dolly. Does she shut her eyes?"

"Yes, indeed; goes to sleep like a good baby whenever she is bidden. Why, you're better already! You didn't feel like playing house when I saw you after dinner, did you?" cried Rob, delighted.

Polly shook her head with happy solemnity. "I never had such a nice doll," she said.

Mr. Grey came in looking pale and tired, but he smiled at white little Polly, and said, as he tipped up her chin: "Rob says you're little Polly Flinders who sat among the cinders, but I think she's turned you into a little coal of fire, right out of the cinders. Do you know what that means—to be a coal of fire?"

Polly smiled, evidently feeling it safer not to commit herself, and trustingly confident that whatever it meant to be a coal of fire, it was something pleasant.

"I am going to lie down here, please little Polly, and if you will sing to Hortense while you rock her I shouldn't be surprised if you made me

go to sleep too," said Mr. Grey, stretching out on the old couch with a sigh of relief.

"Do you feel ill, Sylvester dear?" asked Mrs. Grey, stroking the hair from his forehead. "You look tired."

"Not in the least ill, Mary dear, but tired, yes," replied her husband, kissing the gentle hand. "I did not sleep much last night—too excited and happy, you know—but I am quite well, and still most happy. *Still* happy? Why, I'm going to be happy all my days!"

"You've won, Sylvester," said Mrs. Grey, and she laid her cheek for a moment where her hand had rested.

"I've won—*we've* won through Rob, my son! That's what I've been saying over and over, for the past twenty-four hours," cried Mr. Grey, triumphantly. "You never can know what a help and a comfort you are, Rob boy! It's a good deal of a joy to a man who has been accounted a failure, to know his brains have given his dear ones all they need! If you orderly housewives don't make too much noise in the attic, I'm going to sleep, to dream of my happiness, and for the first time in all my life waken from such a dream to find it true."

"Put me in your dream, Patergrey," cried

Rob, as she ran out of the room, seeing that little Polly had already established herself in the small rocking-chair brought out for her use, and was hushing Hortense to sleep with low croonings.

Wythie joined her mother and Rob in the upper hall, and all three went atticward, laden with the garments of last night's frolic.

It took a longer time to put them away than they had foreseen, for the chests had been sadly upset, and required much rearranging.

The brief winter light had nearly faded before Mrs. Grey straightened herself, and said, with a sigh for the knees which the bare floor had hurt: "Dear girls, it must be more than time to put the kettle on!"

"Perhaps Polly has done it; she ought, to preserve the unities. I don't know what the unities are, but I mean well, and I'm trying to quote 'Polly, put the kettle on' in that clever, indirect way people make allusions in novels," said Rob.

"Thanks, Rob," said Wythie, quietly. "We know the poem."

The little procession of three filed down the narrow stairs, stepping slowly and carefully in the dusk. The house was absolutely still; Prue

had evidently not come in, and perhaps Polly had fallen asleep with Hortense, Wythie suggested.

There was a faint glow in the dining-room from the fire burning low on the hearth. By its light they saw Mr. Grey lying on the couch as they had left him, and Polly's little figure drooping over Hortense in her arms, sound asleep in Prue's outgrown chair.

"The palace of the Sleeping Beauty," whispered Rob, thinking it a pretty picture.

"I can't bear to disturb your father, but we must get tea," whispered her mother back.

Wythie struck a light and Polly stirred, straightened herself, looked, startled, around the room, and then smiled at Rob.

"I didn't know where I was," she said, running to her idol. "Your father woke up and said something quick, and I woke up, too, but when I went to him he was asleep, so then Hortense and I went to sleep again."

"What did papa say, Polly?" asked Wythie, with a sudden fear.

Her mother had crossed to the couch, and knelt beside it. She took her husband's face in her hands, and something in her attitude brought her girls to her instantly. Mrs. Grey laid the

beloved head back on the pillow and raised her face to Wythie and Rob without a sound.

"Mardy!" cried the girls together, dropping on their knees beside her.

There was no need of question nor of answer; no need of the frantic pressure of the motionless heart. No need of Rob's rushing to meet Prue, who opened the door at that moment, nor of bidding her hasten for her life for Dr. Fairbairn.

For they knew, the stricken wife and daughters, that Sylvester Grey had slipped painlessly, quietly away from them, and from the joy of the triumph of his loving efforts for them, into the joy that should never end.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

ITS DANGER

The days that followed its bereavement passed like a dream over the little grey house. There is no preparation for grief; Mr. Grey's death came upon those who had loved him as if there had been no warning of the danger in which he lived, and, as they met the necessary claims and performed the hard tasks their sorrow laid upon them, it was impossible for them to realize that it was the dear dreamer whom they were laying away to dreamless sleep up on the hill, under the great elms of Fayre's old graveyard.

But when these confused days were past and the tall, thin figure no longer cast its shadow over the old doorway, nor the nervous step fell on bewildered ears, unconsciously straining to hear it, Sylvester Grey's wife and daughters began dimly to realize that he had gone away. Of the three girls the loss and loneliness was bitterest to Rob, but it was she who met it most bravely,

resolving to be, indeed, to her mother the "son Rob" her "Patergrey" had always called her.

Aunt Azraella, in her own way, had been a comfort during this first, disturbed week, coming in with perfect efficiency to plan and execute the arrangements from which the Greys shrank, but it was "Cousin Peace" on whom they all leaned now that, everything done, they sat down with sorrow.

One morning, when her sister-in-law had been widowed ten days, Aunt Azraella came down to the little grey house for a business conference. "Little Polly Flinders" was hastily smuggled upstairs, with Hortense to bear her company. She was a different little Polly than Rob had found pining away in the big chintz chair; color was coming into the white little face, and in the necessity of making things cheerful around the child, all four Greys found help and comfort. It was much to feel that they were establishing in health and life the pathetic child who had chanced to be the one to hear the last tones of that voice now forever silent.

"I came down, Mary, to talk with you about your prospects," said Aunt Azraella, unwinding her long barège veil as she seated herself before the fire.

"You must make up your mind precisely what you are going to do. Of course, Sylvester's death doesn't affect you like the loss of a business man such as your brother, my husband, was, but it does settle the question of that invention. Whatever it is, it must remain, so I advise you to see if you can do anything with it, if it has any practical value."

"There was a Mr. Marston, from New York, here to see it two weeks ago," said Mrs. Grey, quietly. "We had a letter from him this morning, offering to buy the machine."

Mrs. Winslow gave a start of genuine pleasure. "Well, I am surprised," she said. "How much did he offer? I hope it will take the mortgage off the house, and leave you a little. But I suppose it wasn't much."

"No; only four thousand dollars," replied Mrs. Grey. "Rob thinks he is trying to take advantage of our necessities, or what he hopes will prove necessities."

"Rob thinks!" ejaculated Aunt Azraella. "Why, Mary, it's a wonderful offer! I hope you wrote at once! If you haven't written, write now, and I'll post the letter when I go out."

"We haven't decided to accept it," began Mrs. Grey, but got no further.

"Now, Mary Winslow Grey," cried Aunt Azraella, "for mercy's sake, don't listen to that child! Even allowing she's not flighty, as I know she is, you have to admit a girl of sixteen is not a competent adviser. You accept that offer on the spot, *on the spot,* do you hear? Four thousand dollars! Why, you can pay a thousand and clear the mortgage, and have three thousand to invest—that'll be quite an addition to your income. It will leave you better off than you were with Sylvester alive."

"Oh!" gasped Wythie. Roberta began to speak very slowly, with manifest effort to be dignified, and to lay aside her natural quickness of speech and retort.

"Aunt Azraella," she said, "you do not understand the invention—no one here does, except me. Either the invention is worth nothing, or it is worth a great deal—more than ten times as much as this offer. You see, the offer proves it is worth something, and if we accepted it we should be cheating ourselves out of about fifty thousand dollars."

"Fifty thousand dollars!" Aunt Azraella

tossed her head scornfully, words failing to express her opinion of this visionary estimate.

"You see; I told you you had no idea of the value of that invention," said Rob. "Pater—our dear father said, the day Mr. Marston was here, that he should refuse an offer of less than fifty thousand dollars. I feel that we have no right to throw it away, for his sake, if not for our own."

"If you don't close with this offer at once it may be withdrawn," said Mrs. Winslow, seeing the effect of Rob's argument on her mother.

"That's precisely what Mr. Marston writes," said Mrs. Grey, "and that's what frightens me. I am so afraid of refusing the only offer we may ever get."

"And I think that proves him dishonest," cried Rob. "He wants to frighten us into closing with him, because he knows if we took time to investigate, we should find out the true value of the machine. He saw enough when he was here—our doing our own work, and our simple way of living—to guess we should need money now we were alone. He is trying to take advantage of a woman and three young girls, and if I have my way, he won't succeed! I hated

him the day he was here—he's a villain, if ever there was one, a smiling villain at that."

"What do you propose doing, then?" asked Aunt Azraella, satirically. "If you are taking matters into your own hands you ought to have some other plan to propose instead of this certain one—for I hope you realize, Roberta, that you are trying to use your influence with your mother to urge her to throw away a certainty, on the chance of something better, and on the advice of a girl of sixteen, who has as much knowledge of the world as my Tobias has."

"I do realize, aunt, and it frightens me, but I was my father's helper all through the last four years he was working on this machine, and I feel I must stand firm, now that he has left it to me. I know we shall be cheated if we take this offer, and sell the bricquette machine to this Mr. Marston," cried Rob.

"Mary, Mary, I have no patience!" cried Mrs. Winslow. "Will you, or will you not, listen to reason and be guided by someone with judgment? You see Roberta does not answer my question! Oh, for the land sakes, why do we talk about it as though she were a person to be listened to? What has she to do with it, anyway? I tell you I have no patience. Go over

to that desk, and write that man you accept his offer, and I'll post the letter before I go home."

"I didn't mean not to answer you, Aunt Azraella," said Rob, with new dignity. "My plan is neither to refuse nor accept, but to write Mr. Marston that we must have a few days in which to look into the matter. If he's an honest man, he won't object; if the machine is worth four thousand dollars to him, he will take it a week later as well as now, and if—and I know it is—it is worth six times that, why, we save ourselves from a trick, that's all."

Mrs. Winslow turned to Rob with a touch of respect in her manner. "That has a little the ring of sense," she graciously remarked. "But you must remember that he may have some reason for wanting that machine this moment or never, and it may be worth four thousand to-day, and nothing a week hence, unless he gets it now. That often happens in business matters. Mary, write your note."

"I confess I'm strongly inclined to your view, Azraella," said Mrs. Grey, "but I can't write to-night. Rob seems to me not like my young daughter, but like her father's representative, and I cannot disregard her, as I should Wythie, for instance."

"And what is Oswyth's opinion?" asked Aunt Azraella, turning to her favorite niece.

"I'm a coward," said Wythie, with a faint smile. "I'm afraid to refuse a certainty of even a small piece of good fortune."

"Sensible girl!" said her aunt, approvingly. "Then Roberta is the only one that stands out against good luck?"

"Stands *for* good luck, Aunt Azraella," said Rob, rising, as her aunt arose, with the air which had come upon her, adding years and dignity to her, since she had learned to suffer.

"You won't write, Mary?" insisted Mrs. Winslow, wrapping herself in her barège defence from the cold wind.

"Not to-night; to-morrow will still be time," said Mrs. Grey, also rising.

"Then I wash my hands of you, and if you come to grief, don't appeal to me for sympathy nor help. I foresee the end; this girl is so headstrong, and will so appeal to your desire to carry out your husband's will, that she will get her way, and your one hope of peace will be gone. You can't help confessing, Mary, no matter how you mourn him, that Sylvester knew nothing of business, and for you to allow sentimentality and a girl's ignorance to wreck you, is little short

of criminal." Having delivered this valedictory with crushing effect, Mrs. Winslow stalked away.

Prue came back dissolved in tears from closing the door behind her aunt; she found her mother, Wythie, and Rob sitting silent and sad around the fire.

"Oh, Rob, dear Rob," cried Prue, hysterically, "you mean well, but how can you be so obstinate? Don't listen to her, Mardy; we shall never be happy again; we shall lose our home, too, if you do!" And Prue dropped, sobbing, in the big chair Mrs. Winslow had vacated.

"Mardy, Mardy," cried Rob, starting up, pushing back her hair with her old, impulsive gesture, and running over to fall on her knees beside her mother's chair, "it makes me nearly crazy to feel I am taking such a responsibility, but I must, for I know, I *know* I'm right! I wasn't going to tell Aunt Azraella my plans, and have her make a worse fuss than ever, but I've laid them, and you must, you truly must, let me have my way. Write this Marston scamp you must take a few days to consider his offer, that you are not prepared to accept or refuse it for a week. It can't possibly make any difference, unless he is a scamp, and then we want it

to. And to-morrow you let me go to New York, and find out what the machine is really worth, and what can be done with it."

"To New York! You, Rob, alone? And you find out what can be done with the invention, you, a young, inexperienced girl? My darling, you are crazy!" cried her mother, while Wythie and Prue sat up with gasps of amazed horror.

"Mardy, I am not in the least crazy. If we had anyone else to do it, we would let them, of course, but who is there? I will go straight to Mr. John Lester Baldwin, the lawyer, Patergrey's college chum, whom he said he would trust utterly. I took his name and address the day Mr. Marston was here, you know; Patergrey wanted me to remind him to write him, but there was no time—" Rob stopped short, and Wythie made a little moan.

"Now, Mardy, this is no wild scheme, you see; it is plain, practical common-sense," Rob continued. "Mr. Baldwin will put me somewhere to board where I shall be safe, and he will do all he can for me when I tell him who I am, and what has happened, if he is the man Patergrey thought him. If he says take the four thousand, I am satisfied, but if he says not to, don't you see how

well it will be that I went? And I have my own money, enough still, for my expenses."

"Rob, Rob, you glorious girl!" cried Wythie, starting up in a rapture. "Let her go, Mardy; she is inspired, like Joan of Arc."

"My Rob, my dear Rob, my brave, reliable daughter," said Mrs. Grey, fondly, "what can I say to you? I am not willing to let you go alone, but if I were, the objections we made to putting off Mr. Marston still hold good. Suppose you fail, and we lose not only the offer, but the expenses of your journey and your stay in the city?"

"Mardy, I shall not fail," cried Rob. "Do you not remember that Patergrey said: 'It must not be less than fifty thousand dollars to be accepted?' That was the last time he spoke of it, you know. He understood its value. I don't like to bother you, but you see it's chiefly for your sake, and, besides, I worked with Patergrey all the time and I feel as though I could not desert the dear invention now, if I wanted to—let it be stolen from us, the work of all that dear life, and its only legacy to us, except the little grey house, with its mortgage. You must say yes, Mardy, my darling; I was Patergrey's 'son Rob,' you know, and I must defend his invention, and

be the man of the family, his son Rob still." Rob's beautiful head dropped on her mother's knee, and the steady, clear, young voice broke pitifully.

Mrs. Grey leaned over and laid her wet cheek on Rob's bright rings of hair, with the red shining through them in the firelight.

"Go, then, my Robert of the lion-heart, go, you dear knight-errant, and have your way. And whatever comes of it we shall never regret it, for we shall remember that you loyally played your part in defence of us all—all, here and beyond," whispered Rob's mother.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

ITS BRAVE DAUGHTER

There was but one really fast train between Fayre and New York, and that left Fayre at quarter to eight in the morning. Not too early, however, for Rob, acting rapidly on her hardly won permission to go to the rescue of her family, to be ready to take her place among its passengers.

There had been wild excitement in the little grey house on the previous night, after that permission had been won, getting together Rob's few requirements for her unwonted journey, and discussing in all its aspects the great feat she was to perform.

But now her pretty face, pale under the black hat surmounting the wayward hair, and big-eyed from sorrow and excitement, looked with brave smiles out of the car-window at Wythie and Prue and the Rutherford boys on the platform as they waved Rob on her way, and the train

started. Rob had never felt more childish and dependent in her life than now, when, for the first time, she was acting like a woman, and going down to the great city to try to arrange a most important business matter.

When Fayre station was left behind, and Wythie and Prue could no longer see her, Rob allowed herself a good cry—the world seemed so big and hollow, and she felt so little and helpless! But in half an hour she was drying her eyes, and beginning to lay her plans, and to wonder, with quickened heart-beats, which were rather stimulating than depressing, how she was to find Mr. Baldwin, or even Broadway, since she did not know one street from another in the maelstrom that is the second city of the world.

It was almost the bright-faced Rob whom her father had known that drew her breath long and hard after the tedious tunnel was passed, and began setting herself right and pulling herself together as irregular and ugly buildings slipped by her in crowds, and the train entered the Grand Central Station.

She took her place in the line, edging her suitcase—hastily borrowed from the Rutherfords late the preceding night—between the wedged passengers, and crawled along toward the door,

too confused to feel much beyond a strong wish that the person in front of her was shorter and leaned back less, since he entirely prevented her hat from keeping straight.

Out on the platform Rob still held her place in the crowd, and found herself at last standing bewildered near the Forty-second Street exits, wondering what she was to do next, and which way to turn to do it.

People jostled her without her knowing it, until a vicious shove of her case, and a muttered remark that reminded her of Farmer Flinders's addresses to his horse, aroused Rob to the fact that she was, in her small degree, impeding the course of progress, and she stepped out on the sidewalk and into the babel of "Cayb? Want a cayb, miss?" while the cab-drivers threatened her face with their whips.

Rob espied a tall policeman and steered her course for him through the maddening bedlam around her.

"Please tell me how to go to Broadway?" she said, looking up appealingly under her overshadowing hat.

"Straight along that way—you can't miss it," said the policeman. "No, wait a bit. What part of Broadway do ye be wantin'?"

"It's near Liberty Street, if you know where that is," said Rob.

"Oh, well, that's different. Stand one side here a minute an' I'll tell ye. Ye don't know N'Yawk?" asked the policeman, taking kindly interest in Rob's case.

She shook her head, and the mammoth guardian of the peace considered, at the same time raising his hand warningly to two encroaching truckmen, and giving the time of day to a frantic woman who carried a bird-cage in her hand and a spaniel under her arm.

"You might take the T'ird Avner L, but ye'd niver find your way over, I'm thinkin'—get out at Fulton Street—no, 'twouldn't do!" the policeman meditated aloud. "An' takin' these Fourt' Avner trolleys is as bad. Ye take this crosstown, and get out at Broadway—tell the conducther to let ye out on the downtown side. There ye'll take a downtown Broadway car—see? Ask, if ye're not sure—an' keep on it till ye get to your number. You can't miss it thin. Not at all, miss; it's wan of our juties to help people. Wait, till I put ye on the car—it's confusin' here, wid the subway an' all. Good luck to ye, miss."

Poor Rob, feeling like a maiden of legend surrounded by dragons, with the yawning, yet

unfinished, subway threatening her on one side, and insanely rushing crowds mercilessly assaulting her on all sides, gladly let the big policeman's strong arm clear a way for her to the car, which came westward through Forty-second Street.

"Broadway!" called the conductor, to whom she had confided her desire to know when that point was reached, and Rob was surprised to see six people, beside herself, rise to their feet, plunge off the car, and the men run as for their lives to swing themselves on another car, going in a different direction, just ahead of them.

"There can't be many Broadway cars," thought Rob, but looked up and down to see an interminable line of them coming both ways, and decided that this was the New York unreasonable rush, of which she had heard so much.

A woman with a gentle face, whom Rob timidly approached, put her in the way of getting the car she desired, and she perched herself sideways on the edge of the seat, watching feverishly the numbers, until she realized that she was twelve hundred numbers above the one which her father had given her as that of Mr. Baldwin's office, and subsided for a time to watch the whirl of life around her, with a dizzy interest that precluded all possibility of thought.

Keenly alive as she was in every sense, Rob could not help enjoying the ride, though it did seem interminable. Beautiful shops, displaying everything a girl cares for, were left behind, great buildings began to tower on either hand; truckmen swore at their horses, small boys tried to see how near they could come to the fender of the car in which Rob rode, yet escape unscathed; timid women ran—very like Farmer Flinders's chickens—head down and arms swinging, before the car, having waited until it was almost upon them; Broadway narrowed, yet increased in interest at every block.

An open square, set on three sides with picturesque old buildings—one really beautiful among them—and a statue which Rob immediately recognized as a figure of Nathan Hale, turned her thoughts to the revolutionary New York into which the car had brought her, but seeing, too, that the street numbers had decreased to the second hundred a few blocks lower down, her mind swung with renewed concentration to her own affairs, and her heart fluttered nervously.

Poised on the seat, ready for flight, she kept anxious watch, and at Cortlandt Street signalled the conductor to stop. Threading her way with difficulty through the narrow way, crowded at

an hour so near noon, her suit-case proving a menace to others and a trial to herself, Rob found at last the number she sought. Without giving herself time to be more afraid, she plunged in at the wide doorway, and joined the group waiting for an elevator to descend.

"Mr. Baldwin's office?" Rob said, low, to the man whose touch on the lever had caused the elevator to shoot upward, and all Rob's powers to seem to sink downward to her feet. The elevator was packed with passengers, all men, some of whom removed their hats, but most of whom kept them on, and stared at the young girl in mourning, with the wonderful hair, and the big, frightened eyes.

"Ninth floor," said the man, and continued his rising career.

On the ninth floor Rob, at a forcible reminder from the elevator man, stepped out, dizzy and confused, clutching her unwieldy case, her sole link with the life she had known. It seemed to her, as she stood staring at the door on which the too plain letters, black on the ground-glass, told her she had found John Lester Baldwin, that there was not left of the old, venturesome Roberta Grey even a voice to announce that person.

"Don't be a goose, Rob," she said, giving herself a vigorous mental shake. "The idea of insisting on coming, only to cave before the door!" She turned the handle softly and entered.

A tall man, with a close-cropped, full beard, and keen yet kind eyes, sat at a desk dictating to his typewriter; he looked up as Roberta entered, and seemed surprised—which was not strange—at the sight of a young girl armed with a suit-case, as if she had come to stay.

"Mr. Baldwin?" inquired Rob, faintly, setting down the case, and thus giving herself even more an air of permanency.

"My name is Baldwin, yes," said the lawyer, rising politely. "This is——?"

"Roberta Grey. My father—I am Sylvester Grey's daughter; do you remember him?" said poor Rob.

"Sylvester Grey, my old college mate? Well, rather! My child, I am truly glad to see you, though you make me feel older, finding you so tall, than my own girl does—perhaps because I am used to her," said Mr. Baldwin, coming over to take both of Rob's hands so heartily, that, to her annoyance, she could not keep back the tears. "I have heard nothing of Grey for some time.

Come into my private office," he added, seeing the brimming eyes, and noting, with a quick change in his own, the black garments his young visitor wore.

Mr. Baldwin led the way to an inner, much smaller room, and put Rob into a chair.

"What has happened, my dear?" he asked, gently. "I am afraid you have nothing to tell me that I shall want to hear. You have come to me because your father told you that if you needed counsel, his old chum would gladly give it you? He was right, but I fear you need it because Sylvester can counsel you no longer—is this so?"

Rob made a brave struggle to control her voice, helped by the low, even tones, and the little pats on her black sleeve which this good man was giving her—as if, she thought, she were a little child in need of comfort.

"My father had been working hard on a patent for years, Mr. Baldwin," said Rob. "He had angina pectoris, and the doctor warned him of the danger if he did not rest, but he could not rest, because we are poor, and he wanted to make us comfortable. He worked harder than ever, in fact, and now the machine is done. But the very day after a man came from here to

see it, and told him it was a success, my dear father——"

Rob stopped short, and Mr. Baldwin patted her hand without speaking for a few moments.

"He had a sweet and beautiful nature, dear, and lived a life that was ideal, in many ways, and that end is mercifully quick. He must have been most happy to know that he had succeeded in providing for you," Mr. Baldwin said at last.

"The last words he said to Mardy and me were full of that thought, Mr. Baldwin. We left him to sleep, and when we came back he had gone," said Rob, trying to smile in the kind face smiling at her, though there were tears in the eyes of Sylvester Grey's old chum. "This was eleven days ago. I don't want to bother you, Mr. Baldwin, but it was to ask advice that I came. The invention Patergrey made was a bricquette machine. Nobody else understood it—not even Mardy—but I did, because I helped him on it for a long time—read his papers and worked the model, and handed him things, and all that, you know. Patergrey called me his 'son Rob'; we were especially much to each other. What I want is to ask you how much that invention is really worth? This Mr. Marston, the man who, as I told you, came to see it, asked Patergrey to

let his firm have the option—don't you call it?—on the invention, and after he was gone Patergrey gave me your name and address, and said he intended writing you to ask you what its value was—I was to remind him to do it. But the next day he died, so suddenly, and we were left to dispose of the machine. We had a letter from Mr. Marston three days ago, offering us four thousand dollars for the invention, and telling us we must take it at once if we wanted it, or it would be withdrawn. All the rest want to accept it, but I begged hard to be allowed to come to see you, and for Mardy to write this man, telling him we must have a little time to think about it. For you see, Mr. Baldwin, Patergrey said he would not accept less than fifty thousand dollars, and I can't forget that. Besides, I think there must be something wrong about a man who offers so little, and wants us to take it that minute."

"What do you know about business, child?" asked Mr. Baldwin. "I wish witnesses on the stand stated matters so clearly."

"I only know what I tell you, Mr. Baldwin," said Rob, feeling cheered. "I suppose Mardy wouldn't have listened to me at all, but that I had been Patergrey's right-hand man all this

time, and she felt as though he had given me a right in the case; as it was, I had an awful time getting her to let me come here and make Mr. Marston wait, and you can see that I must be frightened to take such responsibility, because if we did lose this offer, and got no other, it would be awful, and I should be to blame—no one else."

"I think you needn't be alarmed, Roberta—you said Roberta, didn't you? You are quite right in your reasoning; a genuine offer for a valuable thing would probably be open for a few days, and its owners should be allowed to investigate. Do you think he knows your father has gone, this Marston of yours?" asked Mr. Baldwin.

"Oh, yes; he spoke of it when he wrote," said Rob.

"Then you are more than ever right. Let me tell you, my child, that I admire your courage and strength of purpose very greatly. I'll send my clerk with a note to a friend of mine—a patent lawyer—and ask on general principles what such an invention might be worth, if it were worth anything—we see this is worth at least the sum offered. You lay off your hat while I write, and then you will sit here and talk to me while we wait the answer: I want to hear all about

you, and my messenger won't be long." Mr. Baldwin drew up to the desk and wrote a note, rang a bell, and dispatched it, and then helped Rob divest herself of her coat and hat, and put her comfortably in the window while he won from her the story of the simple life lived in the little grey house, and learned to know the wife and children of his dead friend, whose family he had never met. Rob talked freely, drawn out of herself by the kindly charm which went far toward making Mr. Baldwin the successful lawyer that he was. He read between the lines, understanding much that Rob did not realize she was betraying, and he saw how fine had been the courage that had sustained his friend's wife while Sylvester had been accounted a failure, and how great had been the love for one another that had made life so sweet in the little grey house, while it lacked so much that less wise people consider more essential.

At last the clerk returned, and handed Mr. Baldwin the answer to his note. The lawyer read it and gave it to Rob without comment. In it Mr. Baldwin's friend stated concisely that, although it was obviously impossible to give an opinion as to the value of something of which he knew practically nothing, he could say that it

was worth a good deal, if it were worth anything, and that in either case four thousand dollars was a preposterous offer—it was worth nothing, or it was worth decidedly a great deal more than that.

"That's what I thought!" cried Rob, starting to her feet, joyously. "Oh, Mr. Baldwin, I am so relieved—I was so frightened!"

"As frightened as your namesake, General Roberts, at the head of his troops," smiled her new friend. "Braving an unknown city and a grim, unknown lawyer for the cause of right!"

"Why, they call me 'Bobs' after General Roberts at home when I'm unusually daring," cried Rob, delighted.

"Most fittingly," commented Mr. Baldwin. "And now, 'Bobs bahadur,' I'm going to wire your mother not to act until she hears from me, and add that you're all right; she must be troubled about you. This warrants our holding off on this first offer." And Mr. Baldwin held up his friend's note in one hand, while with the other he drew a telegraph-blank toward him.

The telegram dispatched, Rob reached for her hat, and began to adjust it as she vainly tried to smooth her turbulent locks.

"What shall I do? Go back to Fayre to-

night, or will you tell me which hotel to go to—am I needed here longer?" she asked, thrusting a hatpin through her braid.

"You are needed here, Roberta," said Mr. Baldwin. "My intention is to see certain people who may be interested in your father's invention, and if you really do understand it and can describe it, we can interest them sufficiently to get them to see the models. Can you do this?"

"Patergrey said one day that I could exhibit his invention as well as he could," said Rob, quietly. "That was with the models; describing it might be harder."

"If you can do one, you can do the other sufficiently well to give an idea of what there is to be seen," smiled Mr. Baldwin. "As to a hotel, my little girl, I strongly recommend one kept by a host called Baldwin. It is up in Seventy-third Street, and is fairly comfortable, and quite commodious enough for one person of sixteen. In it there is a landlady who loves such guests, and a girl—the daughter of the landlord and landlady—called Hester Baldwin, who is not rich in sisters as you are—has none, in fact, and who will welcome you as a traveller in the desert welcomes water. So I think there is no doubt that the Baldwin Inn is the best place for you, my

dear; but of one thing I am sure—Sylvester Grey's little girl cannot go anywhere else, so make the best of it."

"How good you are, Mr. Baldwin!" cried Rob, gratefully. "How can I ever thank you?"

"By telling my girl all you have told me, and as much more as you can remember, of the little grey house, my dear," replied Mr. Baldwin, helping Rob into her coat.

"There are qualities in that little house and its occupants sadly out of fashion, and I'd like Hester to taste their flavor. She's a good girl, is Hester; she'll see their beauty. And now, come, my dear Rob, you brave little Casabianca; I'm going to take you home to rest and have a good time. But first I'm going to take you to lunch. Upon my word, we've neither of us tasted food! Why, Rob, you must be starving! And see how interested I have been! That's the first time I've forgotten my lunch-hour since I don't know when—probably not since my base-ball days!"

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

ITS RESCUE

Rob followed Mr. Baldwin and her suit-case from the Sixth Avenue elevated station at Seventy-second Street northward a block, and then westward two blocks on Seventy-third Street, followed hanging back a little, and dreading the encounter with his wife and daughter which lay before her. But Mr. Baldwin drew her up the steps close to his side, with a reassuring gesture of protection, and before he could get his key fully into the lock, the door flew open, and a beautiful little woman, exquisitely gowned, stood before them, while over her shoulder peered a girl of Rob's age, but taller than she was.

"I am glad you came straight to us, my dear," said Mrs. Baldwin, with such quiet sincerity and informality that Rob drew a long breath of relief. "I am sure you are too tired to be as glad to see us as we are to see you, though. Hester, this is

Roberta; take her to her room, and don't let Virginie bother her—you must be her maid to-night. Hester is delighted to have you here, my dear."

Rob returned the sweet woman's welcoming kiss with all the gratitude of her lonely, timid heart, and laid her hand in Hester Baldwin's. The two girls gave each other a penetrating look, and then moved at the same instant to kiss each other, as if the scrutiny had been mutually satisfactory. Hester was not pretty, but she had a keenly intelligent face, and one could see that she was going to make a noble-looking woman.

"We shall dine in half an hour," she said, in a rich alto voice. "Come with me, and I'll help you get ready. The maid will bring your case," she added, as Rob, accustomed to wait on herself, lifted and hastily set down, at Hester's suggestion, her former burden.

"We were pleased when father telephoned that he was bringing you here," Hester continued. "It is very nice to have a girl about; I never had an intimate friend, because I never went to school, and that separates a girl a good deal from others —makes her not fit in when she is with them. Father said you had lots to tell me that was wonderful, all about your beautiful life, and your little grey house, and that you weren't like the

general run of girls of our age either. Please try to like me—father wants you to; I can see that."

"See it over the telephone?" laughed Rob, rather embarrassed by this appeal. "I'd do harder things for your father than that, after to-day! He has been heavenly kind, and made me believe I have been right, and brave, and wise when I was half frightened to death lest my obstinacy had ruined my family."

"That sounds mysterious, and positively thrilling," Hester declared. "But as to father, he is fine—you can't imagine how I love him!"

"Yes, I can," said Rob, with a quiver in her voice that brought a flush to Hester's cheeks.

"Oh, I beg your pardon—I didn't mean to speak of father to you," she cried. "But he told me you had been your father's comfort and help, and were now the only one to understand and fulfil his desires—save his reputation, I think he said. Now, maybe you are more fortunate than I, for I am no use at all, and I never shall do anything for my father in all my life, probably. I think that is worse than your sorrow."

"You can't help doing for him if you love him," said Rob, rather at a loss to answer this morbid speech, yet recognizing the tactful kind-

ness prompting it. "It is all he wants, to know that you are good and love him. Patergrey loved my love for him more than my help on the machine. But it does comfort me to know I did help, and if your father really thinks I'm saving the day for dear Patergrey's invention now I shall almost learn after a while not to be sorry, but half glad that he is happy, and that I did something for him when he couldn't do it himself."

"Oh, yes," cried Hester, with conviction. "I think I shouldn't feel badly if I were you—I don't mean I shouldn't miss him, but you have been your father's comfort. It is perfectly dreadful to be of no use."

"Everybody is of use, I guess," said Rob. "And the best ones don't know it. What a lovely room!"

"Is it?" said Hester. "I don't care much for it—I'd like a little house in the country. I think maybe I shall go into a college settlement when I'm old enough."

"Dear me," thought Rob, "what a queer girl! She ought to do housework, and bother about money for a while, and then she'd find out!" But she only said: "You'd like the little grey house, then. It's old-fashioned, and not a bit

handsome, but it is dear, and Fayre is a small place—country enough."

"How pretty it is, calling the house 'the little grey house'! It is because your name is Grey, isn't it?" asked Hester.

"Both reasons—we're Grey, and the house is all time-and-weather-stained grey, too," Rob answered, shaking her hair out over the dressing-sacque Hester laid over her shoulders. "I haven't anything to put on, except clean collars and cuffs."

"It doesn't matter; we're alone, and black is always full dress and full undress," said Hester. "If I had your hair I shouldn't care about dresses. Are your sisters pretty, too?"

"They are very pretty. Wythie—Oswyth—is older than I, a year, and she's just sweetness—looks, and character, and all. And Prue, the youngest, is a beauty," said Rob, proudly.

"To think of having two sisters!" sighed Hester, laying out Rob's fresh little hemstitched "turnover" collar.

At dinner Rob's shyness returned, but the Baldwins were most kind, and spared her the necessity of more conversation than was required to make her feel thoroughly welcome. The beautifully appointed dining-room, the perfect

service, brought before Rob's eyes in a new light the little grey house, the patient cheerfulness of the dear Grey Mardy through all the past years of drudgery and petty economies, the perfect breeding of the mistress of the little house, and the careful training of its daughters, in spite of adverse circumstances. For the first time Rob realized the difference between wealth and poverty, and that there were hundreds of people who had never felt the wheels of life jar. And for the first time, though she had always worshipped her mother, she fully realized what that hidden, unselfish life had accomplished in keeping life in the little grey house on the plane on which she and Wythie and Prue had been taught to live and think. She caught her breath in a wordless prayer that her mission might not be vain, and that, in the midst of grief, her brave mother might be set free of her long struggle.

Mr. Baldwin and his wife left the girls to themselves after dinner, sitting across the room from their elders, and soon Rob was telling Hester, with more detail and far more humor than she had shown her father, all that there was to tell of Fayre, the river, the little grey house, the Rutherfords and Frances, Cousin Peace and Aunt Azraella, Kiku-san, Wythie and Prue, her

mother, their queer adventures in economy, her story-telling, Mr. Flinders and Polly, and all the sorrows and joys which she saw, from this distance and in this beautiful home, in a totally new and impersonal light.

Hester went off into such peals of laughter that she grew hysterical, and her father and mother came over to share the fun. Rob did not mind them; she had got so excited over her own narrative, and so interested in it, that she could have told the story to the President.

"Why, it's like the nicest sort of a girls' story, Rob," cried Hester. "How perfectly lovely to live such adventures! And here am I all alone!"

"And here are you seeing plays, studying whatever you like, going to concerts, and doing all kinds of things!" retorted Rob. "It's funny enough to tell, but let me assure you, Miss Hester Baldwin, there are times when the mercury gets pretty low in the little grey house."

"It's going to climb, and stay up," said Mr. Baldwin. "And now, Hester, take Rob to bed —she is more tired than she realizes. And tomorrow, while I set in motion the wheels which are to prove the wheel of fortune to her, you show Rob all of New York you can crowd into a day.

I suppose we mustn't try to keep you a moment longer than can be helped, Bobs bahadur?"

"No, please, Mr. Baldwin," said Rob. "I should be happy here, and you are all only too good to me, but they are troubled at home, and need me."

"I can believe they need you, my dear, in joy or sorrow," said Mrs. Baldwin, affectionately giving Rob her good-night kiss.

. . . . . .

"Oh, you're up, are you, Rob?" cried Hester, trailing into Rob's room in her pale blue, eider-down wrapper. "I came to call you. If you're strong enough, I'm going to take you from Dan to Beersheba to-day—or at least from Nellie to Columbia. Nellie's the seal down in the Aquarium, and——"

"Please, Hester, don't tell me Columbia is the college, because even in Fayre we've heard of Columbia College," interrupted Rob. "I'm strong, and shall be ready soon."

Hester was an energetic and resolute young person. She had set out to show Rob New York, and she rushed from one end to the other of the long-drawn city until Rob cried her mercy. "It's a whirl of a Battery, with imaginary old Dutchmen airing themselves by the harbor waves, and

high buildings, as modern as a minute ago, and rattling trolleys, and rising elevated roads bending around dizzy curves, and splendid college libraries, and impressive tombs overlooking the Palisades, and guarding soldiers' ashes and tattered flags, and swarming Harlem flats, and gorgeous Fifth Avenue mansions, and cathedral spires," Rob said at last, sinking wearily down on a seat before the entrance to the Art Museum. "I can't go in, Hester, not if all the pictures in Europe and Michelangelo's Moses are in there. I didn't think I should give out, but let's risk New York and I meeting again, and finishing up. If we don't, I know one of us will be finished up this time for good."

So Hester reluctantly postponed exhibiting the remainder of her city's glories, and took home a thoroughly tired Rob. They found Mr. Baldwin had come home early, and was waiting them impatiently.

"Rob," he cried. "I've great news for you. I have found the very concern which is most interested in bricquette machines, and most ready to purchase the best thing of the sort on the market. They told me to-day that, on general principles, if the concern represented by Mr. Marston would give four thousand dollars for your

father's invention, it would be worth not less than ten thousand to them. I am to take you to see them in the morning, and their representative will probably follow you to Fayre in a few days. At least, you see, we have undoubtedly gained a great deal by waiting, and you are already justified in your wisdom."

Rob turned pale. "You don't know how frightened I have been. Do you think I can go home to-morrow?" she said.

"So tired of us?" suggested Mr. Baldwin, lifting the quivering face by its chin.

"So anxious to get back, because I know how they want me," said Rob, simply. "And just now I cannot stay away from the little grey house. But please don't think me dreadful—I never could tell you how I feel about your kindness. Some day, if Hester will come to the little grey house, all the Greys will try to give her the best time that small edifice can hold."

"We understand, Rob, and I'm coming, just as you're coming back here, for we're going to be friends forever," said Hester.

"And as to kindness," added Mr. Baldwin, "Sylvester sent you to me, and I only do what he would do for my girl, if the case were reversed."

In the morning Rob left the house which she

had dreaded to enter, feeling that the beautiful woman who was its mistress, and the tall girl with her vague dissatisfactions, but ready affection, who had proved a friend at sight, were something that had been part of her life for years, instead of less than forty-eight hours. She went away as she had come, with Mr. Baldwin and her suitcase, for she meant to go back to Fayre as soon as this formidable interview before her was over, but she went reluctantly, and at the corner, when she turned back to wave her hand a last time to Hester and her mother, watching her depart, she could scarcely see them for the tears she was trying to hide from Mr. Baldwin.

Mr. Baldwin took Rob to his office to rid themselves of her cumbersome case, and at once carried her off again to meet the possible purchasers of the invention.

"Stop fluttering, Robin Redbreast," said Mr. Baldwin, feeling the girl's heart palpitating against the arm through which he had drawn her left one, tucking her up protectingly.

"Oh, that's what Cousin Peace calls me!" cried Rob. And the home pet-name helped to steady her.

"They won't devour robins, my dear, and they won't be too business-like with a slip of a sixteen-

year-old girl, so don't be frightened. Just tell them as clearly as you can your recollections of the construction and working of your father's invention, and for his sake, and the dear Mardy's and the girls', do your best."

"I will," said Rob, bracing herself, as Mr. Baldwin felt sure she would. "But I feel so incompetent and ridiculous."

Everything swam before Rob's eyes as Mr. Baldwin opened a door and ushered her into an office where she dimly perceived three or four gentlemen, and solid mahogany desks and chairs. Into one of the latter she felt herself sink, as someone placed it for her, while Mr. Baldwin presented her in words that seemed to be intended to set her at her ease, but which she hardly heard.

Just what happened first Rob never knew, but she found the oldest of these solid, business-like personages asking her questions, and heard her own voice answering as from afar. Then before her eyes flashed a vision. She saw the wainscoted room at home, and her father—Patergrey—bending his thin form over the models, and saying: "You could explain this as well as I could myself, Rob, my son." And now there was none else to do it—she was acting for Patergrey, saving the work of his life from being lost.

She felt as though his wistful eyes were upon her, and she knew that she must not fail him. With that vision fear left her. Straightening herself, she leaned slightly forward in her chair, and said, with a new note of confidence in her voice—confidence in herself and in the machine she had come to explain: "I think, sir, if you please, I can tell you better just how the machine is built and how it works, if you will let me describe it in my own way. If I do not make it clear to you, you will stop me, please, and ask me to explain fully."

The big man with the iron-grey hair stared at this sudden transformation, but Mr. Baldwin understood, with instinctive sympathy, something of what had passed in Rob's mind, and he felt a lump come into his throat as he realized how bravely and loyally Rob loved her father.

Without a moment's hesitation Roberta began her description. Forgetting herself more and more in the interest of her own words, seeing not the stately New York office, but the low-ceiled, dear old wainscoted workroom at home, she rose to her feet, illustrating what she said with articles borrowed from the desk and table before her. Her eyes were dilating and flashing, her color went and came, her voice trembled, but words never failed her, even technical words uncon-

sciously retained from hearing her father use them, words which she could not have used except under the exaltation of her mood and motive.

No one interrupted her; she told her story quite to the end, not noticing the silence in which they heard her. When she ended, and had dropped back into her big chair, her audience stirred. "You are a wonderful young girl, Miss Grey," said the gentleman, who evidently was the person most concerned in the matter. "Your father was singularly fortunate in such a daughter and assistant. We have perfectly understood your description. The invention has important advantageous points of difference from any machine on the market intended for this purpose. I am speaking within bounds in saying that our firm will certainly purchase it, if you will sell to us, and that we shall certainly offer you a fair price, dealing honestly with you. The offer you have received was so dishonest that it is a pity there is no law punishing a rascal for making it, trying to take advantage of women in their new sorrow. We will, by your permission, go to Fayre to see your models, and will then lay before you the offer upon which we will, in the meantime, decide. I can only repeat, Miss Grey, that we want the machine."

Rob arose, trembling in every limb. "If you will send me word when you're coming, I'll meet you at the station; Fayre is rather crooked," she said, faintly.

The gentlemen smiled, and Mr. Baldwin drew Rob's arm through his again, and patted her hand as though she had been Hester.

"Not a bad little girl, is she?" he said, proudly. "You see, she has done her best, and now longs to run away. I am obliged to you for your courtesy, gentlemen, and so is Miss Roberta."

"Oh, yes; thank you ever so much for listening to me," said poor Rob, wondering if she were going to be able to get out of that office without crying like a baby.

"It has been the pleasantest, most interesting, most exceptional business interview I ever had, my dear young lady," said the old gentleman. "I shall go to Fayre myself, for I should like to see your mother. Good-morning, and I shall be obliged to you if you will consider the invention mine until you have refused my offer for it."

"Yes, sir," said Rob, and Mr. Baldwin, to her intense relief, bore her away.

"Not another night, dear little Robin?" hinted Mr. Baldwin. "Couldn't you, wouldn't you, telegraph your mother, and come back with me

to gladden Mrs. Baldwin and Hester's eyes with the sight of you, and their hearts with our good news?"

"Oh, no; please not this time, dear, kind Mr. Baldwin," cried Rob. "Don't you see how I must ache to get back? It was such a dreadful thing to do, and now it's done, I must go home to my little grey house and blessed Grey people."

"I know you must—you shall," said Mr. Baldwin. "I'll take you to lunch, and then put you on the train myself, and speed you away to Fayre."

At the Grand Central Station Mr. Baldwin established Rob in luxury in the parlor-car, and held her hands fast. "I can't tell you how glad I am you have come into our lives, Robin Bobs bahadur," he said. "You shall not slip out again, I promise you."

"Wait till you see Wythie and Prue," said Rob, smiling through her tears.

"Rob will do for me," said Mr. Baldwin, and, stooping, kissed her cheek, "for her dear father, and for herself," he added, kissing the other. And so, victorious, and with new friends, Rob set out on the journey back to Fayre.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

ITS LIBERATION

Rob watched the fields which bordered Fayre, and the splendid, bare-boughed elms fly past the window against which she pressed her face, eager for the first glimpse of the station. It seemed to her that she had been gone for months; she wondered at finding them the same fields and the same elms which she had seen on her departure—another Rob was returning to them, who, she vaguely felt, must be welcomed by changes in the surroundings of her childhood corresponding to those within herself.

There was no one to meet her at the station; she had been too uncertain of her return to announce it, and, leaving her single, but insistent, piece of baggage at the station, she hurried to the little grey house.

She opened the door and came in quietly, yet not so quietly but that Prue heard her step, and came tumbling out of the sitting-room, crying:

"Rob, Rob! Rob's come!" in an ecstasy of joyous excitement.

Wythie nearly tripped up her mother in her haste to follow Prue, but Rob brushed past them both, throwing her arms around her darling Mardy, and hugging her close, crying with joy at getting back to her, and for grief of the loneliness of finding her in her widow's black.

"Rob, my dear, precious girl, I'm so thankful you're here I can't care how your mission ended," cried Mrs. Grey, holding Rob off at arm's length to see her better, and folding her closer than before. "I have seen you crushed by trolleys, lost, weary, frightened, till I could not forgive myself for letting you go."

"Dear Mardy-goosie, you see I'm all right, and you'd better care how my mission ended, for it's worth caring about," cried Rob. "You see I didn't come home on my shield, so maybe you can guess who's the victor."

"Rob, have you good news?" cried Wythie.

"I have a lovely old gentleman coming up here to see the invention, and he is positively going to make an offer for it, but he couldn't tell how much it would be. The only thing he could say was that it would be considerably more than Mr. Marston's offer," said Rob, busying herself

with her coat-buttons, and trying to speak demurely.

"You splendid, splendid Rob!" cried Prue, throwing herself on her sister's neck in a rapture.

"That's because I succeeded; if I'd failed, and sticking to my guns had lost us the first offer, without getting a second one, you'd hardly have forgiven me, Prudy. I begin to see why this is called an unjust world," said Rob, wisely. "But I'm ravenous, dear folkses—can't you feed a poor wanderer, while she tells her story?"

"Rob, dear, we are devouring you so hard with our eyes and ears and hearts we forget how tired you must be!" exclaimed Wythie, self-reproachfully. "We made some fresh gingerbread, in case of company from the metropolis, and we've some freshest fresh eggs from Mr. Flinders to-day—you shall not starve long, dearie." Wythie felt as though her sister were undefinably changed by this short absence, and was half afraid that Rob was growing up.

"And little Polly Flinders?" asked Rob. "How's the poor mite?"

"Wonderfully well; she begged to be allowed to stay up to see if you wouldn't come to-night," smiled Mrs. Grey.

"Let me go get her; it won't hurt her to bring

her down, wrapped up in her gown. She'll like to hear me tell my story, even if she doesn't understand much about it." And without waiting for an objection Rob disappeared, and came back quickly, bearing a sleepy but happy Polly done up in a scarlet dressing-gown, who was fondling her face as she carried her, and whom she deposited in a dining-room chair, tucking her feet up well in the wrapper before she took the place Wythie and Prue had hastily prepared for her at the old table.

"How thankful I am this mahogany didn't go!" sighed Rob. "We're going to be prosperous Greys henceforth, though I don't know yet the extent of our riches. Now, sit ye down, my bonny, bonny lassies, Mardy, Wythie, and Prue, and I will sing the adventures of Roberta the Bold in the Great City of Gotham. No, I don't want any more bread than this, Mardy, but if I did I'd get it—please sit down and listen."

Prue pulled up a chair, and leaned on her elbows well over toward the middle of the table, drawing a long breath of contented yet impatient interest. Wythie placed her chair close to Rob's side, and laid her arm over her sister's shoulders, while the mother Grey took her favorite low rocker, and folded her hands, look-

ing with eyes warm with love and moist with tender, proud tears at her husband's "son Rob," as she told the story of her defence of his invention.

"And that's all," ended Rob, at last, having related every incident of her visit, from her bewilderment as she left the station, and the big policeman's kindness, to Mr. Baldwin's fatherly parting from her in the Grand Central. "I did hold out against you all not to take the offer, but nothing else is due to me. It is all that blessed Mr. Baldwin, and I only hope I can some day make him understand how grateful I am—and to his sweet wife and Hester, too; they were like —well, you can't say like one's own kindred, for they were more thoughtful and loving to me than some of our kindred are."

"But my brave Rob did it all, none the less," said her mother. "I can't thank her for her loyal courage, but I hope her Patergrey can do it for me." And she kissed Rob with a long, clinging kiss that the girl, happy through her tears, felt was not from her mother only.

Polly fell asleep again as Rob talked, and when the triumphant traveller's repast was over, and Prue had volunteered to clear away the reminders, as if, for the first time in her life, she welcomed the chance to serve Rob, the little grey

house was closed for the night, and lights appeared in its low upper windows, for Mrs. Grey insisted that tired Rob must be got to bed.

It took a long time getting there, however; Prue flitted in and out of her sisters' room, not to be deprived of any part of the steady flow of talk going on there, for the mere telling of facts is never all of any story worth telling. Long after Prue had reluctantly subsided, the "ss-ss-s" of whispering drifted out in the darkness from Wythie and Rob's bed, but finally they whispered themselves to sleep, and silence rested over the little grey house which its brave daughter had saved.

Breakfast was scarcely over, when Polly, wiping dishes, announced: "Here's father!" and the Greys saw Mr. Flinders approaching, his right hand bearing a yellow envelope, held with the handle of a large basket tightly grasped, and his face bearing a most unwonted smile. "I come to see Roberta—Mr. Abbit, down to the depot, said you'd got back—and my wife she said she thought you'd like some 'f her jelly," said Mr. Flinders. "She said she'd like to know if Polly wasn't about ready to come home."

Polly looked doubtful. "I'd like to come, if Rob wasn't here," she said.

"I'll go away, Pollykins, go away again, if you say so," smiled Rob. "I think she's well now—don't you, Mardy? Perhaps you ought to go see your mother, dear. She's lonely with no little Polly Flinders among her cinders."

"Polly is quite welcome, Mr. Flinders," said Mrs. Grey, "but if you need her I think she is well enough to be dismissed from our little grey hospital."

Farmer Flinders shuffled his feet uneasily. "She said I'd ought to tell you, but I d' know 's I know how," he began, embarrassed. "We're a good deal obliged to you for all you've done for Maimie, an' I can see my way to carryin' on this place on equal shares next summer, countin' from now. I guess half 'll be 'bout what I'll take in the future, 'stead of two-thirds."

"That's very good of you, Mr. Flinders!" cried Mrs. Grey, appreciating the sacrifice this offer cost. "Come next week, and we'll talk about accepting your proposition. We hope the Greys may be much better off by that time. Roberta has been to New York in reference to her father's patent, and we believe it is going to prove very valuable; we are waiting for news of its purchase now." Poor Mrs. Grey was not guileless in thus taking Farmer Flinders into her confidence.

She knew that he would set afloat rumors of Sylvester Grey's posthumous success, and she was impatient for tardy justice to be done her husband.

"I want to know!" exclaimed Mr. Flinders now, opening his eyes to their widest. "And that's what Roberta went away for—we was wonderin'. Very valuable, is it? I want to know! And Roberta went to attend to it! She's young for such business, seems 's if! Still, she's al'ays been smart, Roberta has. Well, I'm sure I'm glad; you do deserve it. Sho! I've got a telegraph for you in my hand this minute! Here 'tis; I forgot it. I guess I'll be goin'. I'm comin' for Maimie on Saturday, so you be ready, Maimie. I sh'd think you'd want to see your folks. Hope the telegraph is good news; you do deserve it." And Mr. Flinders tore himself away—to spread the tidings of the Greys' approaching prosperity, Mrs. Grey felt contentedly sure.

Wythie had torn open the telegram. "Will be in Fayre on ten-ten from New York on Thursday," she read. "It's signed William Armstrong; is that any of the gentlemen you saw, Rob?"

"It's *one* of them," cried Rob, eagerly seizing

the telegram from Wythie's hand. "It's the old gentleman, and he's coming to-morrow! Oh, Mardy and other girls, don't you hope it will be all right?"

"What will be all right? Hallo, Rob! We heard you were back, and we came to see the city polish you had acquired," cried Bruce. Battalion B had come in the front way unheard.

"Oh, hallo, nice big boys," cried Rob, turning to meet them with outstretched hands and her most April face. "I didn't get much polish in two days, I fear me, but I think and hope I got what I went for."

"Of course you did! We knew what would happen!" cried Basil. "We're going down to get your bag—our bag! We're anxious about it, so we're going to bring it up. Abbott told us you left it with him. And we're going to take you with us to identify us, so get your hat and come along, and on the way you can tell us all that you and Gotham did to each other."

"I suppose I might go to market with these foolish but spotless giraffes, Mardy," said Rob.

"Come with the giraffes, you little brown deer," remarked Bruce, in an undertone.

"And order something special for luncheon to-

morrow when Mr. Armstrong is here," continued Rob, ignoring Bruce.

"Run along, Robin, and get ready while Wythie and I make out our list for you," said Mrs. Grey, with a brighter smile than her face had worn since the little grey house had lost its master.

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Mr. Armstrong had come and gone. Roberta had taken him into the wainscoted room, and while her mother and Wythie listened in wondering admiration, showed their guest the working of the models, explaining each part, and making clear, through her memory of her dear Patergrey's words, that which none other of the family had understood.

A strange half-consciousness took possession of Rob as she talked—she imagined that it was not she herself, not young Rob Grey speaking, but that she was the mouth-piece for the wistful eyes so often raised to hers in that old room, and that Sylvester Grey spoke through her. As in the office in New York, her self-diffidence dropped from her, and she performed her part, absorbed in doing well her father's commission. Mr. Armstrong, as before, had listened silently, but now he was gone, and the Greys sat around

the old mahogany dining-table, gazing, awe-struck and motionless at the slip of paper lying on it. It was Mr. Armstrong's check for fifty thousand dollars.

The bricquette machine was sold, the arrangements made for packing and shipping the models to its owner, and the result of Sylvester Grey's "dreaming"—securing peace and plenty to his family—lay, radiating hope and joy to his wife and daughters, on the old table where once the baby Sylvester had sat by his father's side.

"I never expected to see so much money in all my life," said Prue, speaking first, and sighing like one awakening from a dream.

"Oh, if only your dear, hard-working, misunderstood father could have known!" cried Mrs. Grey, dropping her head beside the check, her whole frame shaken by sobs.

Wythie arose and laid her own head softly on the heaving shoulder. "Mardy, Mardy darling, we will be quite sure that he does know; we will believe he helped Rob stand firm against us all, and win us this great good—we say we believe in the communion of saints, and we will be quite, quite sure that dear papa has this joy, with all the rest," she whispered, her sweet face kindled into rapture, though her tears fell fast.

Rob leaned across and took her mother's hand. "This has done something wonderful for me, Mardy," she said, slowly. "I don't know that I can explain, but it seems to me that all his dear, pathetic, dreaming life Patergrey was but partly alive, and that now he is living, truly living, and his life is complete. I feel as though he had come back to us."

The door opened, and Aunt Azraella entered, stopping short, as she saw the group around the table. "For pity's sake, Mary," she cried, "has something else bad happened to you? I've only just got back, and I have been frantic to hear how Roberta came out. I suppose you've lost that offer, and see now how right I was. Well, I warned you."

"Rob has saved us, Azraella," said Mrs. Grey, raising her head quickly—Aunt Azraella had the gift of drying tears. "Look at this."

Aunt Azraella took the magic slip of paper her sister-in-law handed her. She nearly dropped it, and fell into a chair herself as she scanned it, catching her breath in the magnitude of her surprise.

"Fifty thousand dollars! A check for fifty thousand! Mary, tell me this instant what this means," she gasped.

"It means that our brave, wise Roberta was right; that the first offer was a dishonest one, and that through the old college mate of Sylvester's, the lawyer, to whom he was to have written himself for advice, Rob was brought to honest men, who have given us the real value of the patent," said Mrs. Grey. "It means that we are rich, Azraella, and that in the midst of our sorrow we have been freed from the corroding anxiety of poverty. And we owe it to Sylvester's years of visionary, impractical dreaming, which you so denounced, and to brave Rob's good judgment and firm purpose."

For once Mrs. Winslow was silenced. At last she rallied. "It's more than wonderful, Mary," she said, "but who in the world could have foreseen it? Of course, I'm perfectly delighted. Roberta, I am truly surprised at you; I didn't think you had it in you. But I congratulate you, child, and I'm proud of you. There's nothing in all this world much better to have than a keen business sense, and judgment to know when you're right and to stick to it. I am proud of you. What are you going to do with the money, Mary? It's most important to invest it properly."

"It will go to Mr. Baldwin, and he will invest

it for us—he wrote me, offering to do this, yesterday," Mrs. Grey began, but Rob interrupted her with a glad cry.

"Oh, Aunt Azraella, what do you think we are going to do? Right away—a check for it has already gone to the bank, for we received two thousand more than this big check."

"Put up a fine stone to your father's memory," replied Mrs. Winslow, with a characteristic guess.

"No, no—oh, no," cried Wythie, hastily, while Rob said: "Don't you see what it is? It is already practically done. We have paid the mortgage on the little grey house, and the dearest little old home in the world is all our own, free and all our own, once more. We shall get the papers in the morning."

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

ITS SUNSHINE

The long winter was past, and Fayre lay basking in the warmth of May. The little river reflected the bright green of its newly clad willows, through which gleams of sunshine, too warm for mortals, rejoiced the minnows darting through the shallows. The air was sweet with blossoms and tender verdure, and the song-birds filled it with rejoicing. It was impossible to be sad on such a day, and Wythie, Rob, and Prue, standing in the doorway of the little grey house, absorbing the beauty through every sense, felt their pulses thrill with young joy in living, like the May's.

The little grey house modestly announced to all the world that its winter, too, was over and gone. Newly painted in its own soft grey, the lawn with which its daughters had once vainly struggled, smooth shaven by skilful hands, flowers, once beyond its reach in the strict economy of its finances,

now flaming gayly against its low walls, all spoke of the prosperity with which its last son had endowed it.

No great changes had been made in the beloved little home—too well beloved as it was to admit of them—but it had been made beautiful on its own simple lines, and the girls could hardly help feeling it knew and was glad of its physical well-being. And these girls, too, showed the bettering of their lives in many subtle small ways. Wythie's fresh prettiness was blooming in the brightness it was intended to wear, Rob's variable face was losing its strained look, and Prue's beauty was unspoiled by the discontented expression it had too often worn. Pretty, fresh white gowns, with their black ribbons fluttered by the May wind, were reminders of a loss which was fast growing to be rather a tender memory than a poignant regret. For sorrow of the higher sort brings with it heights of thought and consolations with which to bear it, but the daily struggle to live, the petty cares and vain effort to make too little suffice, eats out heart and brain, with no uplifting to render it endurable.

From their cradle the Grey girls had fought this fight, and won in it nobly, but now that it was over, and an income which to them was abun-

dant was assured them, they drew a long breath, casting off sordid frets forever, and began to expand as nature had meant them to, into light-hearted young creatures, full of their own May-time.

Seeing them happier, and relieved herself of her hard burden, Mrs. Grey, too, was learning to bear her loss, and give herself up to her hard-earned rest and to her girls' petting, with her anxious mental strain relaxed. It was a day of peace, and, to complete it, "Cousin Peace" was coming to spend it with them.

For the first time in years the little grey house was awaiting guests. The Baldwins, all three, were coming from New York to see the house and its inmates which they had been so fortunate in befriending, and Rob burned to make the occasion some approximate expression of her gratitude, and some return for their hospitality to her.

She and Oswyth and Prue were waiting for Battalion B and Frances to go to the woods after dogwood with which to turn the little grey house into a bower, and as they waited on the step Miss Charlotte came.

"Come in, dear Cousin Peace," cried Wythie, kissing her lovingly as soon as Rob gave her a chance. "Mardy is upstairs resting and writing

letters. I wonder how long it will take us to get used to the luxury—the unspeakable delight—of seeing Mardy rest, and knowing that Lydia is in the kitchen doing the work!"

"Blackening the stove particularly," added Rob. "I find now that, on the whole, I hated most of all to blacken the stove."

"Well, I find that what I hated most was what I happened to be doing," remarked Prue.

"You're not to think that we are living in idleness, Cousin Peace," Wythie said, as they led the gentle Cousin Charlotte into the house. "There's only one of Lydia, and one person can't do it all, but it is such a relief to have 'help'!"

"There's enough to be done in any house; I understand, lassies," said Miss Charlotte. "But you were tired lassies, and I am more glad than you know to see your burdens lifted—still more glad for your mother, because I know how happy Sylvester would be—is—to see her resting."

"Oh, I know that, too, Cousin Peace!" cried Rob. "I know how Patergrey felt about 'pretty Mary Winslow,' as he called her to me, having had a hard life because she married him. I'm beginning almost to be glad—though I miss him most of us all—that he won his fight just as he did; I know he would have chosen it so."

"And I'm beginning to feel as though he had not gone away at all," said Wythie, softly; "as though all this comfort and greater ease were he himself, his love and presence around us, and that in having it we had him. I can't explain, but it is such a comfort!"

"I can understand that, dear Wythie," said Cousin Peace.

"Aunt Azraella is coming over to luncheon, and to teach Lydia her famous short-cake," said Rob, after a little pause, as they halted before their mother's door. "She does make wonderful strawberry short-cake, and we are going to stun the Baldwins with it. And she's quite a different Aunt Azraella. She has such a respect for bonds and stocks and coupons, and such little appurtenances, that she regards us through the rose-colored glasses of an invested fifty thousand dollars. She never criticises us—you see we can afford to do what we please—and her respectful manner to me beggars description. Oswyth is nowhere now; flighty Roberta is her favorite niece, all because of my obstinacy and defiance of her opinion! But I stand for the source of gold, and she regards me no longer as fighting 'Bobs,' but as a sort of Kimberley."

"Oh, Rob!" exclaimed Wythie, "don't hunt for motives! It's so much pleasanter to take people at their face value, when it doesn't matter. And Aunt Azraella is really quite nice now, Cousin Peace."

She opened her mother's chamber-door as she spoke, and Mrs. Grey sprang from her big chair to fold in a close embrace her husband's nearest of kin and most of kind.

"Try to bear up under the infliction, Mardy," said incorrigible Rob. "We know you are afflicted when Cousin Peace comes, but don't let her see it so plainly."

For Mrs. Grey was radiating the pleasure she felt in the coming of sweet Miss Charlotte.

"There are the boys and Frances coming down the street, saucy Robin," said her mother. "Take yourselves off, girls, and let me have Cousin Peace all to myself for a while. Wait one moment, Charlotte; Kiku-san is in that chair—he claims it—but I'll lay him on my bed."

She raised the white cat like a round mat, just as he lay, and Miss Charlotte seated herself in the vacated rocking-chair where the breeze blew in on her. Kiku-san rose from his coiled position, sat up sleepily for a moment on the foot of the bed, then, stretching and yawning, walked over

into Cousin Peace's lap, where he contentedly curled up to continue his nap.

They all laughed. "Trust a cat to carry his point!" cried Rob. "That chair is Kiku's, and Kiku will have it, whether Cousn Peace or a down pillow is in it."

"We're off for dogwood, Kiku-san," said Prue, laying her cheek on the cat for a farewell. "And we'll bring it home with plenty of bark for bad kittens."

Mrs. Grey watched the seven young people out of the gate, and her eyes and lips were smiling. Miss Charlotte said, as if she, too, saw the pretty picture: "They are fine boys, Mary, and there are no girls so sweet and pretty as our Grey ones. Do you ever wonder if a lifelong affection, of a stronger sort, may grow out of this beautiful triple friendship?"

"I suppose it would be impossible not to dream of it, Charlotte, but Wythie and Rob are simple girls, and too unconscious to dream of it themselves," said their mother. "I should be glad if it were to be. Yes, I do think of it, and I realize my girls are hovering on the verge of womanhood. They have been too busy, too homekeeping, to cross the line early. Sometimes I think Basil and Bruce, with their half a year ad-

vance of Wythie and Rob, are already building a little romance, and I see that Basil finds Wythie just about perfect in all ways, as Bruce evidently considers all other girls mere sawdust beside bright Robin, but it all lies folded in the future, and no one can foresee. It would be a lovely little idyl, and I dare to hope for it; almost to feel sure it will come some day."

"I think it will," said Miss Charlotte, quietly, and the two women smiled at each other, full of loving pride in the girls who were to them both dearest of all girls, prettiest, bravest, sweetest.

It was high noon, and very warm, when the faint sound of distant singing announced to Mrs. Grey and Miss Charlotte and to Mrs. Winslow, who had by that time arrived, that the seven were returning. The singing grew louder, clearer, and at last developed into nothing more classic than the darky song, "Won't you come home, Bill Bailey?" chosen as appropriate, and rendered with immense expression.

Almost at once the procession came in sight. Prue and Bartlemy ahead, Prue more than ever beautiful under the great boughs of dogwood, which, like the rest, she bore. Oswyth and Basil followed, Wythie's face looking out flushed and glowing with summer warmth and happiness un-

der the great white, blotched, so-called blossoms of the shrub. Rob and Frances divided Bruce between them, making an arbor over his head, holding above it, by an effort, their spoils of the glossy green and dazzling white. All seven were singing at the tops of their fresh voices, and even Aunt Azraella could not resist the charm of this return, but smiled benignantly at them from the window.

"You never saw anyone so changed as Mr. Flinders," remarked Mrs. Grey at luncheon, as she busily served her guests to fresh peas. "Not only does he carry on the place on halves, instead of two-thirds profit—which is really much fairer —but, now that he has started in well-doing, he is going uphill in virtue, Rob says, as if he were on an inverted chute. He is truly grateful to us —to Rob especially—for taking Polly last winter; he and his wife insist that we saved her life, and I am surprised and delighted with the feeling he shows."

"Being disagreeable is like other habits," said Miss Charlotte. "When people once break off and get over the embarrassment of having their pleasant ways noted, it is quite easy to keep on, even to increase them daily. I believe half the cranky people are so just because they fell into

the way of it, and feel awkwardly self-conscious when they behave like other people."

"You ought to know, Cousin Peace," said Rob, suggestively, and, before the laugh with which her hint had been received had died away, she pushed her chair back from the table. "Come on, you three big boys and little girls," she cried. "Do you realize that it is now half past one, and that the Baldwins arrive at four? That isn't long in which to decorate the little grey house, make the toilets of its inmates—Kiku-san's ribbon alone needs five minutes to tie—and get a triumphal procession of welcome down to the station to meet them. You can't have another piece of cake, really you cannot have it, Bartlemy—unless you put it in your pocket. Jump up, all of you!"

Rob's younger guests meekly obeyed her, and presently she had them all at work, filling every available vase and jar with water, and bringing them to her—"like Isaac's slaves returning from the well," Bruce said—in the cool pantry where the girls were arranging the dogwood.

It was not long before the little grey house was massed with the woodland beauty—old fireplaces, narrow mantels, every table and corner, all was full of the starry white, brown-blotched radiance of the dogwood.

Rob fell back to admire, leaning an elbow on Wythie and Frances's shoulders, and shutting one eye in exaggeration of Bartlemy's artistic manner of scrutinizing a sketch. "I think it will do, my brethren and sisters," she said, solemnly.

" O little house that gave me birth,
We've laid the dogwood on thy hearth
Because the guests now drawing near
Kept you from going to the dogs, my dear—

oh, mercy, I thought that would turn out better. It would, if I had time to develop that noble thought—but you've got to mispronounce hearth or it won't!" cried Rob, bringing her disastrous attempt to a hasty conclusion.

"I could do something better than that this minute, but I won't, because you do so hate to be beaten," said Basil.

"I never know I am," said Rob, and they all shouted, because the statement was quite true.

"Poetry reminds me of the story-telling; are you going to keep it up another winter, Rob? You must, for you've become an institution of Fayre. The children will be heart-broken if you don't," said Frances.

"I don't know; I'm not over-scrupulous, but

it never seemed right to me for anyone to earn money unless they have to, and now—only think of it—I have enough! I should hate horribly to keep money from a girl having as hard a time as I have had," said Rob.

"But there is no one else to do this, and so you don't wrong anyone. It would be a shame to stop, really," protested Frances.

"Well, we'll see; this is only May, and there's plenty of time to decide—plenty of time for everything in this new, blessed life of ours!" cried Rob. "Maybe I'll carry it on in Kiku-san's name, and send the proceeds to found a Rescue League for animals in New York like the one in Boston—you'd like that, wouldn't you, my affectionate little white-chrysanthemum-in-Japanese?" she added, catching up their pet and swinging him to her shoulder.

"Time to dress to go to the station, children!" called Mrs. Grey from the dining-room.

"Come in here and see the little grey house in its parlor," Wythie called back. "Aunt Azraella and Cousin Peace, too."

They came at once, and stood on the worn doorsill surveying the low-ceiled room, fresh and cool in its green paper, high, white wainscoting, and white paint, its few fine engravings and soft grey

prints on the walls, and the starry dogwood lighting it all.

It was really beautiful, and Mrs. Grey caught her breath, with a sob of gratitude that, in spite of her greater loss, the dear little old homestead was left her.

The girls caught the sound and understood her thought—it was too recent a joy to them all ever to be far beyond the mind of each of them. Wythie, Rob, and Prue ran over to their Mardy and twined their arms around her, all three, and hugged her close.

"We have it safe, and we have one another," whispered sweet Oswyth.

"It's the loveliest spring of all my life," said Prue, solemnly. "And in the winter I didn't dare to think of summer again."

"Behold a group of Grateful Greys," said Rob, dashing away a tiny tear from her bright eyes before anyone could suspect it of being there, and laughing blithely. "Aren't we perfect geese about our little grey house? We couldn't love it more if it were an old feudal, ancestral castle—though it would be bigger."

"Three cheers for the little grey house, and three cheers for the Grateful Greys!" cried Bruce, with an inspiration.

"For the house where we've had such glorious times, and for the people we love best of all the world," added Basil, with a half-glance toward Wythie.

"Amendment carried!" cried Bruce, with an open look at Rob.

The open windows bore the cheers out to Farmer Flinders in the garden, and he stopped work to listen, leaning on his hoe, and smiling to himself with unwonted benignity.

"Well, they're havin' happy days in the little grey house at last," he said aloud. "And I declare to mercy, they deserve 'em! There's no doubt they all do deserve 'em."

THE END